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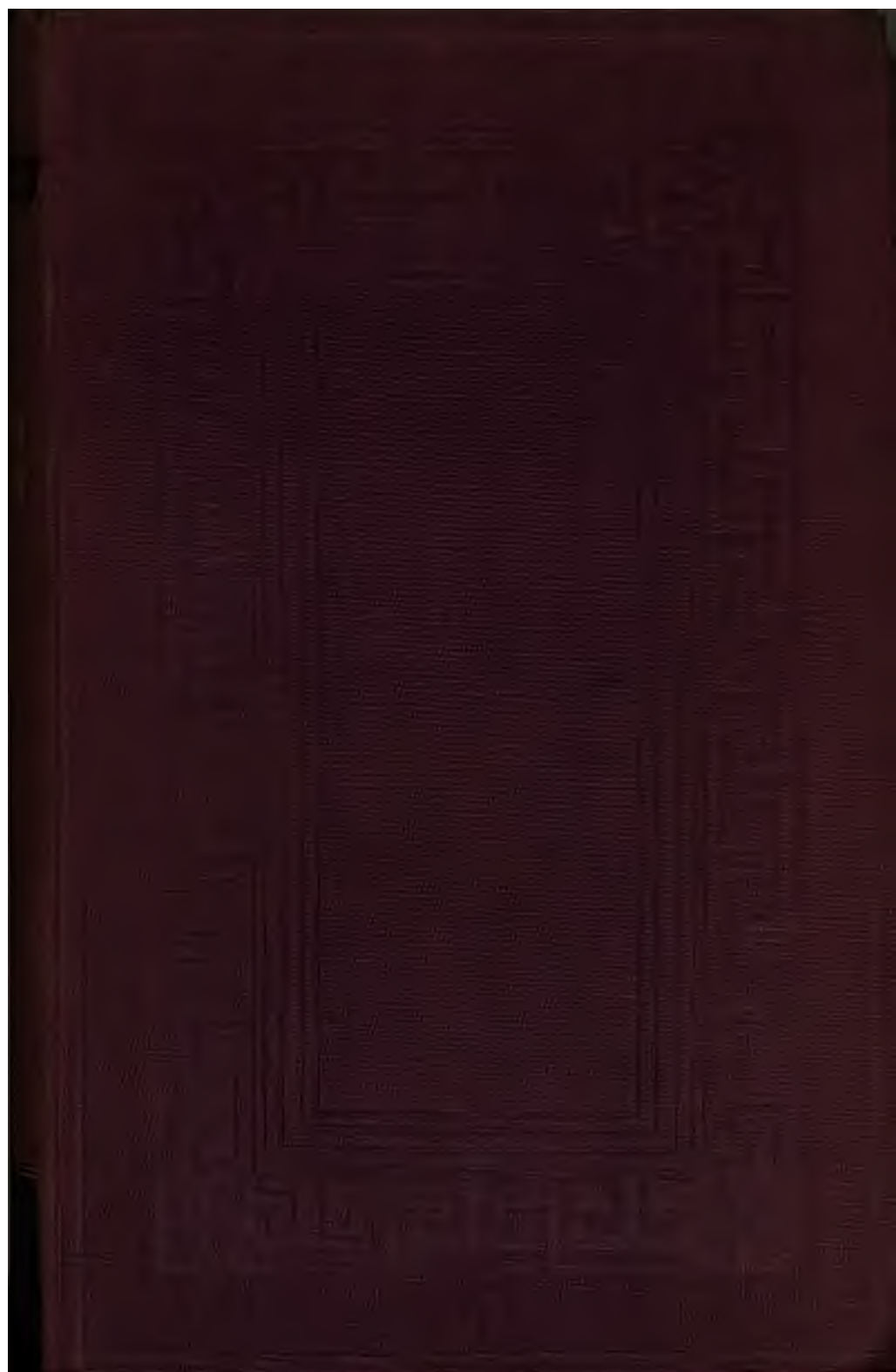
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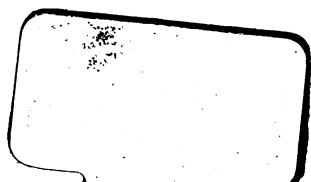
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THE GREAT EXPERIMENT.

CHAPTER I.

"Ah, take the imperfect gift I bring,
Knowing the primrose yet is dear,
The primrose of the later year,
As not unlike to that of Spring."

IN MEMORIAM.

MARY's matrimonial concerns were forcibly recalled to her aunt's mind, sometime after, on hearing that Arthur Maynard had arrived in England. She knew that his family had lately renewed the friendly relations existing before the young lady's rejection of his hand; and wondered whether the two would be thrown together again, and with what result. Of the state of Captain Maynard's affections she could be no judge; but Miss Wentworth, she was sure, had formed no new attachment, and still cherished his memory, though she avoided all reference to the subject.

All the emotions, however, so resolutely kept down, started into fresh activity at the intelligence that he was once more free, and on English ground. In spite of the most strenuous efforts to keep her thoughts from wandering in that direction, she could not take up a needle, or lay her head on her pillow, but straightway her imagination was at work, calculating the probabilities of her meeting him, and picturing the circumstances of the encounter. As time went on, the conviction gained upon her that she should not see him at all, and she was half ready to smile at herself for the perturbation into which the bare prospect had thrown her, and the useless pains she had taken to prepare for an improbable event.

It fell out, however, that her father, being engaged in preparing a volume of sermons for the press, exchanged duties for a few weeks with a clergyman in the outskirts of London, in order to be within easier reach of his publisher; and having taken her into town one afternoon to see one of the exhibitions of pictures, whom should they come across but Mrs. Maynard, her daughters, and her son. Mary caught sight of them first, and would have turned into another room,

but Mr. Wentworth, who knew nothing of the state of affairs, had espied them too, and drew her on, exclaiming:

“Well, this is fortunate! There are your friends the Maynards, Mary. Let us go and speak to them.”

All parties were taken so completely by surprise, that they had no time to be flurried, or to get up a formal countenance. On the impulse of the moment, hands were shaken, kindly enquiries made; the walls around them furnished abundant materials for safe conversation; and when they separated, Mary was astonished to remember how smoothly the interview had gone off, and to find herself engaged to spend a day with them before they left town. During that day they all fell so naturally into their old habits of intimacy, that the cloud seemed to pass out of their minds, and when pressed to pay what used to be an annual visit to them in the country, she had little hesitation in complying with the request.

Arthur was very little changed. His wife's death had been a great shock to him; but when the first burst of grief had subsided, there were many considerations to mitigate his sorrow. If

his year of married life had not been long enough to exhaust his affection for his beautiful bride, it had taught him the insufficiency of mere external charms to secure domestic happiness, of mere good humour to overcome the trials of life. Some perception also had the widower gained of that want of fitness in the alliance he had contracted, which is more fatal, perhaps, to wedded peace than any one definite fault on either side. In more experienced hands, Eglantine might have turned out differently; a stronger will might have neutralised her foibles, a wiser head have guided her aright. Arthur had felt his own incompetency, and a sense of relief mingled, in spite of himself, with distress at his sudden bereavement.

How soon other visions began to float before his eyes, it would not be discreet to enquire; the sight, at any rate, of Mary Wentworth reminded him of aspirations he had once cherished, and which it might not yet be too late to realise. He had not ventured upon any direct enquiries after her, fearing to betray an interest unbecoming his weeds; but when the ice was broken, he supported the motion, timidly made by one of his sisters, to invite her down

to Dorsetshire; and proceeded, though cautiously, to ascertain how she stood affected towards him. His sisters flattered him with the assurance that he had no rivals to apprehend; the grand question was whether the frank cordiality, which Mary had decided was the best tone to adopt, did or did not betoken indifference to a rejected suitor. She avoided being alone with him—that might arise from a variety of causes; she did not talk much to him, nor seek his attention, which was rather discouraging; but then she always listened when he spoke, and remembered what he said, and her whole manner towards him was unmistakably, though indescribably different from that she employed towards any one else. Yet, if she cared for him, why had she refused his hand?

Mature consideration led him to place another enigma by the side of this, viz., if he cared for her, how came he to marry some one else? and he began to suspect that one answer might serve for both. Remembering his readiness to interpret a dubious reply into a dismissal, he could not but acknowledge that his suit was not very warmly pressed; and that a girl like Mary Wentworth, not intent solely on securing a hus-

band, no matter on what terms, might justly have seen cause to distrust his sincerity. She must, in fact, have witnessed his flirtation with Miss Leycester, and have wondered, as he began to wonder himself, how he could entertain at the same time a *penchant* for two women of such opposite styles. Every day he spent in Mary's company, confirmed him in the belief that she was the wife he ought to have chosen; and it pleased him now to reflect that his former application had not met with a very decided negative. Any way, he thought it worth trying again.

The opportunity presented itself *à propos* of a discussion, held one evening at a friend's house, on the subject of "second love." Mary maintained the unity and indivisibility of that divine passion, which, to be worthy the name, should absorb the entire being, and admit of no change, even in the absence of reciprocity, or at the death of its object; for, as she said, quoting Carew:

"How ill doth he deserve a lover's name,
Whose pale, weak flame
Cannot retain
His heart in spite of absence or disdain;
But does at once, like paper set on fire,
Burn and expire."

Arthur contended, on the contrary, that as love is the product of more than one faculty, it

was quite possible, without incurring the imputation of fickleness, to be smitten successively through the senses, the intellect, and the judgment; and Miss England, the pretty daughter of the house, sided with him in thinking Mary's theory much too fine for common use.

"Some excitement of that kind is so indispensable," said she, "that if one lover failed me, I should be compelled to take up with another in self-defence."

"*Varium et mutabile semper fœmina!*" exclaimed her father, with mock horror.

"Dear me! Papa, I can adduce poetical authority as well as Miss Wentworth. Hear what Tennyson says:

"My heart, though widow'd, may not rest
Quite in the love of what is gone,
But seeks to beat in time with one
That warms another living breast."

"It may be quite possible and allowable to form a second attachment," observed Louisa Maynard timidly; "but surely no after-growth can equal the first expansion of the heart. I believe, with Moore, that

"there's nothing half so sweet in life
As Love's young dream;
'Tis light that ne'er can shine again
On life's dull stream."

"Since the poets are to be taken as arbiters on this momentous question, I beg to produce my oracle," said Mr. England, junior.

"Oft first love must perish,
Like the poor snow drop, boyish love of Spring,
Born pale to die, and strew the path of triumph,
Before the imperial glowing of the rose,
Whose passion conquers all."

Without exactly adopting Maynard's theory of a plurality of loves, I do think some allowance should be made for the inevitable change of one's opinions and tastes. Let any man of twenty-eight or thirty remember his chosen pursuits and companions of ten years before, and ask himself whether he is still of the same mind. If not, it is probable that his ideas of female excellence have undergone a similar modification."

"That's it, Robert," assented the elder gentleman; "there's not much discrimination in young people's attachments. It sounds very pretty to be a man's first love, Miss Louisa, but believe me, it is much safer to be his last; and as to you, Miss Mary, don't lay your account on being his only one, for such a miracle of constancy is not to be met with every day, and he might turn out but an impracticable sort of fellow after all."

Robert England walked home with the visitors, taking a Miss Maynard under each arm, so that Mary was left in charge of Arthur. It is well-known that moonlight predisposes the soul to tenderness; that partial darkness emboldens the timid lover, and renders consent more easy and graceful. Profiting by these advantages, Captain Maynard resumed the conversation which had occupied the party, and drew from it an argument in his own favour.

"Dear Miss Wentworth," said he, with appropriate action, "do not disdain my devoted attachment, because I have worshipped at another shrine. Even on your own showing, my passion for you is a genuine one, for it existed before any other fancy distracted my senses, survived your repulse, and glows now as fervently as at first. I was mortified at your coolness, and yielded to a fascination of which I partly saw the hollowness; but my *heart* has really never wavered in its allegiance. I made a grievous mistake in supposing that I could be happy with any one else; so far from loving you less, that apparent infidelity has only strengthened my appreciation of your worth. I may not perhaps deserve the boon I seek, but I

should know how to value it; and if my fondest affection, my highest esteem and admiration can make up to you for the want of more heroic qualities, you may safely trust me with your future."

Mary's answer proved that, like many another fair theorist, she did not expect to realize her own ideal of a lover. She was herself faithful to the doctrine she preached, for her inclinations had never once wandered from their pristine object, nor would she, perhaps, ever have married another man. Her feelings on concluding the engagement may best be gathered from the letter in which she announced it to Mrs. Leicester.

"I believe," she wrote, "that he is really in earnest this time, and I have not the uncomfortable suspicion that I should have done him a greater favor by denying his request. As to myself, I love him well enough, and not too well; not so blindly as to overlook his faults, but fondly enough to bear with them. A common female error, indeed, is an excess of love, beyond what these vain, selfish, or sensual men deserve, or even appreciate. Milton, methinks, was quite wrong in ascribing Adam's fall to

overweening affection for his wife; such might plausibly have been Eve's excuse, had their situations been reversed; but it is more likely that he was jealous of her knowing more than himself! The love of man, in fact (as may be read in the sequel of the narrative), is *woman's curse*; yet she believes earthly felicity unattainable without it!

"I never could perceive the superior nobleness of the other sex, of which I have heard enthusiastic females talk. Our minds are narrowed by education, and easily affected no doubt by physical causes, but when circumstances have developed their powers, women have not proved deficient, either in energy, endurance, *finesse*, or magnanimity. They are also, as a body, highly conscientious. Now men appear to have no conscience in small matters; and either they are never taught, or they will not learn self-control. In short, as the Son of Man, if He exhibited any human resemblance, bore a woman's features, so among women, if at all, do we recognise a moral likeness to the Son of God."

"Miss Wentworth is about right," said Hyacinth Leycester, when his wife (as married

women are pretty sure to do) showed him her niece's epistle. "That want of self-control leads men into more mischief than evil intention; but when are we ever taught to exercise it? Not in the nursery, where the boy is the acknowledged despot. Not at school, to which he is sent before either character or habits can be formed; where is the master, who, in addition to teaching Latin and Greek, spends any thought upon the morals of his pupils, cultivates a strict sense of honor, checks arrogance, brutality, selfishness, and vindictive feelings, and, above all, inculcates the right motive for right deeds? Are we not allowed, not to say encouraged, to fight, and tyrannize, and persecute, and mock, to practise all manner of meanness and deceit, restrained only by the fear of detection; in short, to grow up like little heathens, with our worst propensities finely developed, our manners utterly neglected, and our heads empty of everything but verbal lore? It is the same story at College, in the Army, at the *début* in life; the youth is thrown into temptations of all kinds, without any fixed principles to guide him; so he runs into debt, he drinks, games, quarrels right and left, plunges into dissipation, tramples

upon every law, divine or human, and becomes a *roué*, a debauchee, or a blackguard, according to circumstances. What can you expect from such training? You don't bring up women so; yet we have stronger passions, and greater freedom to indulge them, and are therefore more in need of the power of self-government."

"You are growing quite a philosopher, Cinthy," observed Anna, smiling.

"I have been forced to think," he answered. "Give my congratulations to the bride elect; Maynard is not a bad fellow in his way, and she will make him an excellent wife, no doubt, though I thank Heaven she is not mine. To be loved 'well enough,' would not satisfy me at all."

CHAPTER II.

"I would have thee gone :
And yet no further than a wanton's bird ;
Who lets it hop a little from her hand,
Like a poor prisoner in his twisted gyves ;
And with a silk thread plucks it back again
So loving—jealous of his liberty."

ROMEO AND JULIET.

LADY ETHEREDGE gave a singular account of her mother's conduct. On returning to England, she had written, proposing to go down to Lincolnshire, unless Mrs. Desart were likely to be in town. To this letter she had received a formal reply, to the effect that after her undutiful behaviour, Mrs. Desart could not consent to re-admit her to the family circle, and, in justice to her younger daughters, must decline an intimacy which might be fraught with perilous consequences to their principles. She therefore begged Lady Etheredge not to attempt the renewal of an intercourse which her own wilfulness had broken off.

"And so," cried the indignant Veronica, "I

am not to correspond with my sisters, or see anything of them! I can't think what could possess Mamma to send me such an epistle. She never used to be so very strict in her notions."

"It is so unlike her style, that I can hardly believe she wrote it," said Violet, who did not object to notice her brother, now that he had resumed his domestic relations, and lived "properly," *i.e.* like other people of his class.

"It is her handwriting, beyond all doubt," said Hyacinth, after examining it narrowly. "She favoured me with just such another frigid epistle when I wrote to . . . to tell her of my accident," and he sighed deeply at the recollection.

"It appears to me," said Rose, who as well as her sisters was visiting at Hildhurst, "that since this second marriage of hers, Mamma has become quite estranged from her children. Since poor Eglantine's death, not one of us has seen her, and our letters are either unanswered altogether, or acknowledged in this fashion. Mr. Desart must exert some evil influence over her; I never fancied the man."

"My love, it is wrong to cast blame lightly upon a clergyman of the Church of England,"

was Mr. Aguilar's grave rebuke. "If, in seeking to wean your mother from over-attachment to worldly pursuits, he has found it necessary to isolate her even from her family, his judgment should not be questioned."

"It seems to me a dubious kind of religion," said Hyacinth, "that begins by hardening a woman against those nearest to her. I thought its benign influence was to turn the hearts of parents towards their children, not away from them."

Mr. Aguilar could only purry this home-thrust by some general remarks upon the presumption of the laity in pronouncing upon matters ecclesiastical, which sentiment found little favor with his audience.

While all personal communication with the Rectory was steadily refused or evaded, the few letters that were received gave rise to endless perplexities as to the condition of its inmates. Lady Wilfred, perhaps, would get a brief note from her mother, hinting great disappointment with the neighbourhood in which her abode was fixed, and the style of living she found it necessary to adopt; and a week or two after, Mrs. Aguilar would produce a lengthy epistle, expres-

sive of devout satisfaction with her lot, and enjoyment of the simple pleasures with which her cheerful home abounded. Next, a fairly-written sheet would be addressed to the Leycesters by one of the girls, speaking in warm terms of "Papa's" kindness; while a hasty scrawl from the other would soon after inform Veronica that Mr. Desart's tyranny made their lives miserable; and this would be followed by a retractation in due form, attributing the former statement to anger at well-deserved correction.

Which of these descriptions was the true one, there were no means of ascertaining; and as it was difficult to imagine a motive for wilful deception, the varying moods of the writers were supposed to influence their pens, and occasion these discrepancies. Hyacinth was not satisfied with that hypothesis, but his infirmity prevented his taking any active steps in the affair, and his three brothers-in-law, with the common dislike to interfere in a business which did not immediately concern them, were deaf to all his suggestions.

"This is the perversity of fate," cried he, after a last ineffectual effort to stir them up to action; Aguilar dissenting, Grafton doubting,

and Etheredge evading the responsibility. "This is the very perversity of fate. For the first time perhaps in my indolent life, I feel the inclination to do what ought to be done, and now the ability fails me."

Mrs. Leycester tried to console him by the assurance that a duty so entirely out of his power, was clearly not designed for him to execute; and drew off his thoughts to Mary Wentworth's wedding. Anna could not be present at it, because she must have been two whole days at least away from Hyacinth; but she went to Southampton the week after, to see the young couple before they sailed.

"I have always," said Mary, "considered it an odd custom to begin a domestic life by travelling about, and passing what is supposed to be the most blissful period of existence amidst the petty discomforts of hotels and steamboats; but in my case a journey was compulsory, so I thought that the honey of our first moon might as well be employed to sweeten its inevitable bitters."

She looked very happy; exile had no terrors for her, and she was not discouraged at the idea of seeking her home on a foreign soil. Gratified

affection, the attainment of a long-cherished desire, so lighted up her countenance, as to render it positively pretty; and her whole appearance indicated that she was one of those women who are improved by matrimony. Arthur spoke of her with a warmth that won him Mrs. Leycester's heart, and altogether she augured well for the success of his second EXPERIMENT.

In enumerating the guests at her wedding, Mary mentioned the Bathursts.

"Tell me, my dear," said Mrs. Leycester privately, "how do they get on together? Is their reconciliation genuine?"

Mary shook her head. "Laura leads a dismal life, I fear," answered she; "Mr. Bathurst is naturally cold, naturally *ombrageux*, and after the shock to his confidence those defects have increased to an almost insupportable extent. Formerly Laura could combat his unsocial propensities, and use her power as a young and pretty woman to thaw his reserve, but he has now acquired a right to prescribe her demeanour, and keeps her at a hopeless distance. They see scarcely any company, and when they do, Mr. Bathurst's surveillance is so close as to paralyse her spirits, and

make society a penance rather than a relief. Their friends, too, taking their tone from him, treat her in the returned convict style, as if she held her place among them on sufferance, and could not complain of scant courtesy, where she had no claim to any."

"The Pharisees!" interposed Mrs. Leycester, "ever ready to pounce upon a weakness to which they are not liable, a fault in which at least they have not been detected."

"I do not know whether it is a proof of narrow-mindedness, or of superior virtue," pursued Mary, "but the class to which my poor friend belongs, is certainly far more severe than any other upon such offences as hers. What, after all, has she done to be pursued with such unrelenting rigor? Yielded a little too incautiously to the pleasure of an agreeable man's company! Now, in his set, for instance, a married woman is not condemned for being admired."

"On the contrary, many husbands would be displeased if their wives were not noticed. There is my young sister-in-law, Veronica, never moves without a train of *attachés*, and Etheredge is quite proud of her success. I do not say whether he is prudent; but as to the general question, it

seems to me doubtful whether the strict or the liberal rule shows the higher standard of morality."

"Oh! surely there cannot be two opinions on that point," cried Mary. "I certainly objected to the application of the strict rule in my friend's case, but in theory I approve that jealous care of female purity which keeps it as far as possible out of harm's way, and deems it contaminated even by a suspicion. Once break down the external barriers of decorum, and who can tell how soon the citadel may fall?"

"That is one view," said Mrs. Leycester, "and a sound one enough; yet extreme sensitiveness is no proof of a healthy organization. I almost prefer the creed which, with less punctilio, exhibits more confidence "*dans le mérite moral des femmes*," and credits them with virtue robust enough to dispense with leading strings. Which, think you, speaks most for the honesty of a people, the custom of leaving doors unlatched and windows unbolted, or the invention of complicated locks and ingenious alarms?"

"I should say the open system was all very well in a state of primitive simplicity, but that,

as the world goes, it is better to keep valuables under lock and key. It must be admitted that errors of the kind we have been discussing are less common in the middle ranks, where due, or as some may consider, undue vigilance is exercised; and for my part I am glad my lot is cast where temptation is rare, and the path of danger is sedulously strewn with thorns."

"And I, my love, am quite sure you would keep the straight road under any circumstances. You possess two amulets, either of which will preserve a woman's heart from wandering; namely, a strong sense of duty, and a sincere attachment to the man who calls you his. It is no doubt in the middle class that domestic happiness chiefly flourishes; among the very poor, the hard pressure of existence produces callousness and brutality; among the very lofty, idleness engenders intrigue. Those placed midway between these extremes are, generally, too well educated for violence, too busy for flirtation. How should the merchant, occupied all day at his desk, the doctor passing from patient to patient, the clergyman directing the affairs of a parish, the country gentleman overlooking his farms, have leisure to indite *billets-doux*, and in-

vent the countless stratagems by which such *liaisons* are formed and kept up?"

"And what of officers, dear aunt?" asked Mrs. Maynard smiling.

"Oh, my dear, they are always reckoned among the idlest portion of the community, except when actually fighting; so after all you must look to yourself, not to circumstances, for the preservation of your domestic peace."

Anna was welcomed on her return home with a genuine transport of delight.

"Not but what I have been very well cared for," said Hyacinth, fearing she might reproach herself for having quitted him at all, "but my life wears quite another aspect without you. It is a dead calm, under a cloudless sky. I have no wants, no fears, but also no enjoyments."

The wife's heart rejoiced at finding herself grown thus indispensable. To be everything to the man who engrossed her whole soul, seemed a fulfilment of all her youthful visions; yet how had they been realised? She did not deceive herself as to the tenure on which she held her prize, and looked forward with something like dread to the period when his restoration to health would render him independent of her solicitude.

Time, which stays not, nor hastens, for all our longing, was bringing that period near. Two years and more had elapsed since Hyacinth was first placed under Dr. Brown's treatment, and nearly three since the injury was received which had laid him prostrate. His improvement had been more rapid than the physician had ventured to anticipate, and strict confinement to one posture was no longer deemed necessary. One relaxation after another was cautiously conceded, till he was allowed to exchange his narrow frame for the sofa during several hours of each day. Many more weeks intervened before he put his foot to the ground, for through long inaction he had completely lost the use of his lower limbs. His weight was fortunately small, so that Anderson lifted him with little difficulty. He soon grew impatient of this method of locomotion, and was perpetually trying to get upon his legs, to the horror of his wife, who lived in fear of a relapse. The doctor, however, rather encouraged these attempts.

"Let him try, my dear madam," he would say; "he won't go far, you may depend upon it, and a commencement must be made. By and by, when he begins to revel in his newly-

recovered powers, danger may arise from over-exertion, but hardly now, when his ambition is limited to making the circuit of the room."

Having accomplished this feat, his promenade was extended to the terrace, to the great astonishment of Ben Mio, who followed him about with wondering eyes. The animal, having learnt to walk upon his master's recumbent form, had come to regard him as a fixture, and did not know what to make of this new aspect of affairs. Hyacinth was still obliged to be carried up and down stairs, and to recline for hours after every new effort of strength. He did make a valorous endeavour one day to descend without support; but finding himself grow weak and giddy, was fain to sit down half-way, till somebody came by to rescue him.

Still, if his progress was slow, it was uninterrupted. One point after another was gained, and Mrs Leycester need not have been so startled as she was, when she at last saw him step unsupported into the conservatory, as fair and fresh-looking as any flower therein; his bright eyes sparkling with triumph at the

achievement. A tide of conflicting emotions rushed over her; fear, delight, and the vague pain which all great changes inspire. Her bird, then, had escaped the cage, and would henceforth need but to spread his wings and fly! He was so like his old self, that she checked her first impulse to run and throw her arms about him, from a doubt, long unfelt, of being welcome. He perceived her agitation, without divining its cause, and dropped upon a bench near at hand, saying:

“Never fear, Anna, I am not going to take a flying leap over the geraniums just yet. A fellow gets precious stiff with lying stretched out, like a figure on a tomb, for three long years. I am agreeably surprised to find that all the hair is not worn off the back of my head.”

“Did Dr. Brown give you leave to march about in this independent fashion?” observed Anna, fastening a sprig of myrtle in his button-hole.

“He said I might sit in a chair now and then, and walk as much as I felt inclined, provided only I did not *stand*. I asked him if I might go to Church to-morrow, but he would not hear

of my being stuck up for two hours bolt upright in a pew."

Mrs. Leycester's functions were not yet abolished; her husband was very glad to avail himself of her arm to regain the drawing-room, and appeared in no haste to dispense with any of the attentions paid him during what he called his captivity.

CHAPTER III.

"Un jour en bien suprême
Ma douleur se changea,
Car il me dit, 'je t'aime !'
Et je l'aimais déjà."

DURING the slow progress of Hyacinth's convalescence, his wife had often considered within herself what line of conduct she must in future adopt towards the prodigal whom chance, and not inclination had restored to her arms. Embarrassment was now created by the very circumstances which had originally facilitated their reunion. Had it been brought about by any ordinary method, much awkwardness would have been unavoidable on first meeting, but the terms on which they were hereafter to stand might have been calmly discussed and agreed on. As it was, Hyacinth's mysterious disappearance worked up her sensibilities to a high pitch of excitement, and when she discovered him at last, his sufferings, his helplessness, and subdued tone

betrayed her into an effusion of fondness she would not have deliberately exhibited. She had no hesitation in assuming her proper place beside her husband's sick bed; the case was too desperate to admit of doubt or delay.

When he became conscious of her presence, it required more than gentleness and kindness to soothe his wounded spirit; services prompted by pity alone would have stung him more than neglect. Had she come to the task with a far less placable disposition, she could not have remembered his faults while he lay racked with pain, burning with fever, and weighed down by a long accumulation of misery. His tears could not be dried by a merely vigilant nurse, nor his pillow smoothed by a distant hand; reserve would have been cruelty, and dignity unnatural.

Even when this phase of severe anguish had subsided into extreme weakness and depression, the force of attraction that drew her to him was scarcely diminished. When she raised him, as she only knew how, to receive food or medicine, there was no preventing his languid head from leaning on her bosom; when his hand lingered, as it frequently did, in hers, there was no

rejecting its pressure; when he looked for an embrace, and this was not seldom, who could resist the appeal? For a long time he could not sleep unless she were near him; and lately her arm had been his constant support. It was not easy to withdraw from the familiarity thus engendered; yet, as he gradually shook off the traces of infirmity, Anna felt that their intercourse must shortly be placed on a new footing. She was resolved not again to mistake courtesy for tenderness, and build up another unsubstantial fabric of hope, which should crush her in its fall. Gratitude might impel him to counterfeit emotions he did not experience: this species of amiable hypocrisy it must be her task to prevent.

It was of no use to delude herself with the belief that any sentiment stronger than friendship could, under ordinary circumstances, exist between a man of his years and a woman of hers. Instances to the contrary were not wanting; Mahomet could overlook the fifteen years that lay (on the wrong side) between him and his Kadijah; Shakspeare, Johnson, Howard, and Sir Thomas More, men of some discrimination, were all much younger than the women to whom

they committed their domestic happiness. Helen of Troy, it is calculated, was close upon sixty when young Paris carried her away from Menelaus, and refused to surrender her to the united hosts of Greece; while Ninon de l'Enclos retained her charms long enough to turn the head of her own grandson. But Anna could not hope to share the exemption from the common lot enjoyed by those few favored members of her sex. Better, far better, for her to rest content with her youthful consort's confidence and genuine attachment, than to exact, or even accept tokens of a warmer feeling which it would quickly burden him to feign.

But how should she signify these views to him? To a woman, there is always a difficulty in refusing what has not been formally offered, lest she should become ridiculous, while she means to display generosity. Nor perhaps would a verbal renunciation, however distinct, completely answer her purpose, which was to show that she did not expect, not that she was determined to repel, his advances. Pique might dictate the latter course, which he would think himself bound in honour to overcome. If the former argued indifference, that alternative, hard

as it was deemed the preferable one. It was, of course, no part of her design to drive him from town; she simply wished to leave him free to act as inclination moved him. She had cherished him through his time of trouble with all a mother's tenderness; and was ready to continue her housekeeper, companion, friend; whether he cared to recognise her in any other capacity, it was for him to show.

Hymanth was not slow to accept the challenge thus boldly thrown down. To a nature like his, escape from some woman was a necessity of life. Cut off from all contact with the world without, he had had leisure to observe his wife with an attention never hitherto bestowed upon her; and ended by discovering a number of attractions for which he had not given her credit. He viewed her now, no doubt, through a halo of gratitude; but in truth, barring the one great disadvantage of cohabitation, there were charms enough to satisfy his taste. Beauty had never been hers to lose; but she had a clear, soft skin, glossy chestnut hair, a very pretty hand and arm, perfect teeth, a good and moderately full figure; and was perhaps more comely in her ripe matronhood, than she had been in her girlhood days. As she moved

about him, ministering to his wants, Hyacinth thought that a man was not to be pitied who possessed such a spouse, and calculated on gliding imperceptibly back into the position he had forfeited, when he would amply atone for his former insensibility.

"I will make that woman the happiest wife in England," was his emphatic declaration to Mr. Dacre, who had questioned him as to the terms on which he stood with Mrs. Leycester.

"*Il ne tient qu' à vous, beau sire*, of course," was the half-sarcastic rejoinder.

Hyacinth certainly did not anticipate any impediment on the lady's part, and was no less confounded than annoyed at the *rôle* now assigned him, which, if as good as his deserts, was not at all in accordance with his wishes. The mere semblance of opposition stimulated them into greater fervency, and led him to pursue his object with far more eagerness than he would probably have displayed in merely seeking to fulfil a benevolent intention. Divers schemes did he invent to overthrow the barrier so unexpectedly set up against him; but in vain, his hints were misunderstood or disregarded; his

more open efforts, quietly but steadily defeated; no cause of complaint was furnished him, yet he felt himself kept at arm's length.

The effect of such a system upon a man who believed himself (and not without some show of reason) irresistible, was to irritate him excessively; he was not prepared at once to sue for favors he had thought to confer, and, in true spoilt child fashion, took refuge in a fit of the sulks. Clouds hovered perpetually upon his brow; he gave short answers, and never volunteered a word; he would not eat, he would not be amused, he would scarcely allow himself to be touched; rejected sullenly the assistance of which he was not yet quite independent, or accepted it with ungracious reluctance. When not downright cross, he assumed an injured tone, and gave himself the airs of a martyr suffering unmerited persecution.

Mrs. Leycester hardly knew how to interpret a display of ill-humour so foreign to his character. Perhaps the restraints still imposed upon him grew more irksome as the sense of vigour revived. Perhaps—but no, she feared to indulge in delusive speculations as to any other cause for his

discontent. It must be treated with indulgence, and not allowed to influence her conduct in any way.

Finding his moody behaviour unnoticed, and that Mrs. Leycester was neither offended at his waywardness, nor induced to take peculiar pains to pacify him, Hyacinth thought fit to recover his temper, and adopting new tactics, applied himself as sedulously to the conquest of his wife, as if she had been some one else's. All kinds of pretty attentions were showered upon her, his whole artillery of looks and words and nameless fascinations, was brought into play, and nothing omitted that a lover, at once ardent and ingenious, could devise. Anna's resolution was half shaken; but she had been intoxicated once before, by the fumes of that delicious incense, and was on her guard against it now.

Where neither persuasion nor force can compass a desired achievement, stratagem often succeeds. From direct courtship, our young adept in the art of seduction proceeded to lay traps for the enemy. He was fond of lingering by moonlit windows, and lying dreamily in the firelight, carrying on a conversation suited to the scene, in a voice subdued to the proper pitch. He be-

guiled her into singing impassioned duets, such as the *Tu m'ami* in *Les Huguenots*, to which, if he could not rival Mario's unparalleled vocal powers, he at least imparted some of that consummate actor's thrilling expression; and delighted to read aloud the most amorous poetry, throwing into it a fire and pathos sufficient to turn a dozen heads. Anna often felt her pulses throb, her cheek glow; every sense responded to the magician's touch, and she was afraid to look his way, lest she should betray her own emotion, or forget that he was only playing a part.

Then he had headaches, and fits of lassitude, rendering it necessary for him to be lulled to rest upon Anna's knees; a settled melancholy seemed to take possession of him; his voice acquired a plaintive inflection; he sighed frequently, and his glances conveyed a sorrowful reproach, which Mrs. Leycester would have found it hard to withstand, had she not all along suspected his drift.

It was plain that from one motive or another, from pique, from love of mischief, or for the mere sake of occupation, he was bent upon overcoming her determination to stand aloof from

him. She had a womanly relish for the contest in which she found herself engaged, and believing it to be on his side a mere trial of skill, could permit herself to be amused at the neatness and multiplicity of his artifices, without much fear of inflicting serious disappointment. It had been hard sometimes to resist his beseeching eyes, and disengage herself from his caresses; but there were moments when she fancied she detected a gleam of merriment under his drooping eyelids, a smile lurking round the corners of his mouth, and was encouraged by these evidences of insincerity to persevere in her affectation of merely sisterly interest.

Yet in truth Hyacinth's pains and troubles were not altogether simulated. He had worked himself very nearly up to the state of feeling he professed; and his health really was disturbed by the constant worry of his spirits, so far as to render him feverish and uncomfortable. He often attempted, too, more than his strength would enable him to accomplish, and was knocked up in consequence. Sometimes genuine despondency laid hold of him; had he lost the power of pleasing? or were his wife's affections so irrevocably estranged from him, that when, after many

wanderings, he turned to his own hearth for legitimate enjoyment, it would be denied him evermore?

The idea first depressed, then exasperated him. It was galling to waste his sighs upon an insensible idol, who could be generous, but not tender; could forgive his faults, but not love him in spite of them. Perhaps he had gone too far in seeking to propitiate her, and afforded her the triumph of disdainning him, at which thought his brow reddened; perhaps (for women are strange beings) he had been too humble in his suit, and had lowered himself in her eyes by pleading where he should command, and entreating as a favor what he might claim as a right. Something in Anna's demeanour seemed to confirm this suspicion, and caused his ill-suppressed vexation to break forth. He would no longer be trifled with. Impatient of failure, and keenly apprehensive of ridicule, he flew at last into a violent passion, upbraided, threatened, announced his will, and insisted upon compliance.

Anna was taken quite by surprise; up to this moment she had never imagined him thoroughly in earnest, and though not displeased at his as-

sumption of marital supremacy, was half-frightened at the vehemence with which he asserted it. She had held back at first from a disinterested, if perhaps over-refined scruple; latterly there had been something of coquetry in the way she had led him on by feigning retreat; but she had worked without much faith in her own cause, and was startled, not to say terrified, at the completeness of her victory. Unable to utter a word, she sat gazing at her indignant lord with a countenance on which, of many emotions, alarm was the most prominent. He saw it, and his mood changed instantly.

"Forgive me, Anna," he cried, flinging himself down beside her, and encircling her waist with both arms, "I am a brute to talk of compulsion, but you do not know to what desperation your coldness is driving me. Am I so altered that you shrink now from a contact not always deemed unwelcome? or have you, in a refinement of vengeance, won my heart only to trample upon it? I admit all you would urge against me. I remember with shame how little consideration I merit at your hands; yet since you cared enough for me to resent the treason, have you no remains of love for the traitor?"

Was it only benevolence that brought you to my side in my distress? only sisterly kindness that tended my couch and breathed new life into my exhausted frame? Would that I lay there still, if illness was my sole title to your regard!"

Anna's heart beat almost audibly; a mist gathered before her sight: "What would you have?" she faltered, scarcely knowing what she said. "You know how dear you are to me; you know that your lightest wish . . ."

"I know that you are an angel of goodness and self-devotion," interrupted Hyacinth, impetuously; "but, oh! Anna, I want a wife. I cannot live longer in this dim twilight of semi-reconciliation. Either tell me at once that I have grown hateful to you, and am tolerated here simply in deference to public opinion; or take me to your bosom again, and let me earn my pardon."

The voice, the tightened clasp, were more eloquent than the words; yet Anna still hesitated. Anxiously she looked into the radiant eyes raised to hers in eager supplication. She had on divers occasions seen them flash, and sparkle, freeze, and melt; but they glowed now with quite a new light. There was an expression in them,

never beheld by her before, yet which she could not fail to recognise. Hitherto, duty, good nature, habit, policy, caprice, gratitude, had in turn prompted his fitful tenderness; at last, she was loved, in the fullest sense of that word,—*aimée d'amour*. To adopt a subtle French distinction, "*non seulement il l'aimait*," her amiable qualities had all along procured her that amount of attachment, but, "*il en était amoureux*," a consummation of which she had sometimes dreamed, but never thought to reach.

Duly considered, the passion is, perhaps, inferior to the sentiment, inasmuch as it belongs to the earthy half of man's nature, and cannot survive this state of being; yet, woman-like, she sighed for the unknown good, and valued the rare tribute to her personal charms more than the homage habitually paid to her mental and moral superiority. A thrill of rapture shot through her every nerve; a colour deeper than "maiden's blush" suffused her cheek; her eyelids drooped instinctively; but Hyacinth had caught an answering ray, and took from her lips, though she spoke not, the assurance that henceforth he would ask nothing in vain.

About two months after, as he was preparing,

in unwonted exhilaration, for his first ride, Anna brought him a bouquet of his favorite lilies-of-the valley—a flower it became him well to wear, since its French name, *muguet*, signifies (or signified, for there is much change of fashion in these terms in French as well as in English) an exquisite, a lady's man.

"They have bloomed just in time for the occasion," said Mrs. Leycester, placing them on his breast. "*Retour de bonheur*, what could be more appropriate?"

"You should have given them me one day in March," said the young man, in his most honeyed tone, adding the touch of a "*bocca dolce più del miele*."

She watched him mount, with some slight effort, his thorough-bred steed, laid on him many a parting injunction to take great care of himself, and when he was out of sight, crossed the park in another direction to the cottage inhabited by her adopted child. As she opened the garden gate, Jasmine, now about four years old, ran out to meet her, shouting lustily, and clinging round her with all the confidence of old friendship. Mrs. Leycester took him up in her arms, covered him with kisses, and listened to

his eager, broken talk with maternal interest and patience. She examined into the progress of his small accomplishments, which, including a popular song, piped with remarkable accuracy as to the tune, and that total innocence of meaning which makes childish performances so amusing, were willingly displayed for her edification; and received with becoming gravity nurse's report of his behaviour, comprising the destruction of sundry toys and articles of apparel, and a fierce assault upon Martha, the handmaiden, for presuming to salute him with a grimy countenance.

At this proof of fastidiousness, Mrs. Leycester could not repress a smile; whereupon the young gentleman, who had been eyeing her intently to ascertain whether he was to laugh or cry, peered up at her from under his long lashes with a glance at once arch and demure, half defiant, half deprecating, and laid his soft cheek against hers, with an amount of trust in that mode of smoothing away difficulties that would have done honour to Hyacinth himself.

This said resemblance, which endeared him so much to his kind protectress, was a serious obstacle in the way of her plans for his benefit. It

had always been her intention to bring him up as her own; and when compelled reluctantly to remove him from under the same roof, she did not contemplate any further separation. As long as her husband continued a prisoner to his couch, the arrangement answered extremely well. Now that he was on foot once more, and able to wander over the premises alone, Anna's fears of a rencounter revived. Had it not been for that fatal likeness, she would have made no secret of the adoption; the child's friendless condition and her loneliness were adequate reasons for the measure, and Hyacinth was not the man to object to such a disposal of a little spare cash, though he might probably dislike to see a foundling seated beside his own hearth. As it was, the father, she thought, could no more fail to recognise the son, than he could mistake his own image reflected in a mirror. Indeed, if the relationship were to be concealed from the household and the whole village, her poor little pet must shortly be removed to a greater distance.

Just yet, however, she shrank from the idea of placing him entirely under hired guardianship; he was too young to be sent to school, and though his nurse appeared trustworthy, it was of

course more satisfactory to have him under her own eye, or, in her temporary absence, under that of the Vicar, or Mrs. Simpson, who both took an interest in his welfare. It was now May; the establishment at the Lodge would be transferred in a few days to London; if, therefore, the cottage should escape notice for that short period, all immediate danger was over, and Jasmine might disport himself in peace until the end of the season.

CHAPTER IV.

"We need not bid, for cloister'd cell,
Our neighbour and our work farewell,
Nor strive to wind ourselves too high
For sinful man beneath the sky."

KEBLE.

HYACINTH was in no hurry to go to town that year. Life had, as it were, begun afresh for him, and he entered into its simplest pleasures with new relish. He was very happy in his second honeymoon; and enjoyed the freedom with which he passed in and out of doors, incurring little fatigue, exciting no remark. When, however, Mrs. Leycester proposed the move, he made no objection. She had, as we know, her own reasons for wishing him away from Hildhurst, and was moreover anxious that he should not grow weary of seclusion.

How often is the affection that might have lasted out a lifetime squandered in the unrelieved monotony of *la solitude à deux*! Tempers must be angelic indeed, tastes must be

wholly free from human caprice, that can bear the test of perpetual contact, perpetual uniformity. A son of Adam may live alone, though an infallible authority has pronounced it not good for him; but if he attempt to associate an Eve with him in his retirement, a serpent will quickly spring up among the flowers of his Paradise, and drive him forth into the haunts of men. Intercourse with the world without disperses many a cloud that would otherwise hang for days over the domestic horizon; and interruption is necessary to preserve us from that satiety which pursues men through every pleasure earth affords.

The Leycesters had not been many days in London before Anna was convinced that she had acted judiciously. Hyacinth took out his opera-glass with a sigh of intense satisfaction, and surveyed himself before making his first appearance in public, with a *naïf* complacency that showed his wife he would not be sorry to have other admirers. It was wonderful, she thought, as she glanced over his toilette, how so striking an effect could be produced with the very limited means a gentleman now has at command. Black cloth and white linen afford so

little scope for taste and invention! It would have been difficult to say what distinguished him from the majority of his sex, and yet this indefinable superiority was universally perceived and acknowledged.

His triumph was all the more complete, that it appeared to cost him so little. Whatever pains he might expend in getting himself up, he never exhibited any uneasiness as to the result, nor seemed oppressed with his own magnificence; no cynic, stoic, or other lofty contemner of mundane vanities, was ever less *embarrassé de sa personne* than this prince of exquisites, when once the business of decoration was fairly concluded. You never caught him stealing furtive glances at the mirror, to make sure that all was right, nor betraying by the stiffness of his carriage any fear of discomposing the studied elegance of his attire. He had taken pleasure in arranging its details, and having a quiet belief that the *ensemble* was not unsatisfactory, left it to create its due impression upon the beholder, without further concern on his part.

If failure ever befell him, it was not on the present occasion. His valet looked the approbation he was too well-bred to express; Mrs. Ley-

cester felt proud to be seen on his arm; the loiterers about the opera doors voted him "a tip-top swell;" while within the house, despairing rivals reluctantly confirmed the verdict, and hundreds of bright eyes beamed commendation.

He evidently enjoyed the whole scene, the splendour, the music, the beauty, the excitement, the renewal of old associations; not a sense, scarcely a faculty, was ungratified. The jewelled throng that filled the house was the very *élite* of the land; the show of fair faces and stately forms was bewildering; the orchestra was the finest in Europe; the opera was a superb conception; the singers displayed powers, both vocal and dramatic, rarely to be equalled, never to be surpassed. Hyacinth threw himself back in his chair at the close of the third act.

"I am afraid I was not cut out for a good man," said he, very gravely. "With the best intentions in the world, I shall never be able to forsake Covent Garden for Exeter Hall, or find a missionary meeting as attractive as the Italian stage. The preference is, I dare say, a proof of innate frivolity; but just imagine, Anna, instead of this brilliant spectacle, a

stuffy, ill-lighted room, crammed with unheard-of men, not given to change their garments too often, and dowdy women carrying umbrellas; a narrow form to sit upon; a deal table, with a glass of water, by way of *mise en scène*; and for performers, half-a-dozen fellows in white chokers, prosing on one after another about the Feejee Islanders, or growing rabid about Maynooth! The whole to conclude with a dismal attempt to raise a strain of psalmody in the style of Dr. Watts, and a polite intimation that money will be collected at the doors. Then there are the philanthropic gatherings, baths and washhouses, Christian hosiers' early closing associations, abstinence-from-everything, and reform-of-everybody societies; and by way of personal edification after so much benevolence, there are lectures, by all sorts of people, from half-witted noblemen to half-educated shopboys, on all sorts of subjects—Luther, indigestion, the prevalence of cerebral disease among the inhabitants of the moon, the poetry of Fitzball, the connexion between Tenterden Steeple and Goodwin Sands, 'Shakespeare, taste, and musical glasses.' But under all these phases, there is always the same frowzy audience,

the same decanter of water, the same weary ocean of talk, talk, talk. It is of no use expecting it; I never shall take cordially to that kind of thing."

"If attendance at such places constituted 'a good man,' I should indeed despair of you," was Anna's reply to this harangue. "But without impugning the praiseworthy motives of many who frequent them, I do believe that a large proportion are drawn together by the very same craving for excitement which brings us to the theatre. It is the habit among a certain class to make the stage a target for the shafts of pious indignation. The 'playhouse,' according to them, is Satan's peculiar property; an actor, and still more, an actress, must of necessity be an abandoned wretch; while all who assist at the performance, no matter what the character of the drama, are called very hard names, and considered irreclaimable."

"In which sapient and charitable conclusion, they are confirmed by their clergy, who unsparingly condemn a diversion from which they are themselves, by I know not what law, debarred."

"The prejudice, if you will, that excludes them is so generally prevalent among all deno-

minations as to be entitled to respect; though why there is more harm in witnessing human follies and passions represented in action than in reading of the same in a book, I have never been able to comprehend; nor why a piece of music, accompanied by appropriate gestures and costume, should be more pernicious than when sung in a concert room without those auxiliaries."

"In a concert room," repeated Hyacinth; "aye, or within these very walls, provided those wicked foot-lights are not turned on. Didn't our reverend brother-in-law go to a rehearsal at Drury-Lane to hear St. Léon fiddle, though he stigmatised me as a worldling for attending the full performance? And don't his brethren flock of a morning to hear Fanny Kemble read the plays they will not see her or anyone else act at night?"

"To say nothing of a sly visit now and then to the theatres in Paris," added Mrs. Leycester. "However, the fitness of *their* presence at such places is another question. If they think their usefulness as ministers of religion likely to be impaired by participation in even a lawful amusement, they are perfectly right to abstain.

Only it does not follow that every one else must be bound by their rule."

"They might as well contend that all who attend their ministrations should adopt their garb. If, as you say, the universality of a custom makes it respectable, the argument may certainly be used in favour of dramatic entertainments, which have been in all ages the delight of every people in any degree removed from barbarism, with the single exception of the Hebrews, and, perhaps I should add, the Scotch. A taste so widely diffused must have the same source as those from which the other fine arts spring. Why is this one development to be forbidden, while others are permitted? How can poetry, painting, music, be licensed, if the combination of all three is improper?"

"Let those answer who draw the line. For my part, I see but one valid argument, and that is, that all amusements whatsoever are wrong. If it be affirmed that time is too precious to be squandered in imaginative recreations, the real business of life too solemn and too important to stand over such pauses—in short, that it does not become perishing sinners to trifle on the brink of

the grave, I admit there is much force in the objection; but, on the other hand, experience does not show that abstinence from all relaxation is beneficial to moral, more than to material health. Before I give up my box at the Opera, I should like to be assured that the persons who denounce it are better employed; because if they are whiling away the hours at home in idle chat, censorious gossip, or petty bickerings, it seems to me that my evening is not more unprofitably spent than theirs."

"That is precisely my idea," said Hyacinth, "and I don't perceive that these serious people improve themselves or others much by what they call rational pastimes. They are often morose and disagreeable, just for want of a little wholesome dissipation, to freshen their spirits and change the current of their blood. I defy any man to go home from the Polytechnic to-night a whit more amiably inclined than we shall be after this glorious finale. I should grow as sour as vinegar if I were condemned to the Rev. Hornblower and Co. for the rest of my days; and as a tree is known by its fruits, the effect of any pursuit upon the temper is not a bad criterion of its merits, is it, Anna?"

Here the curtain drew up, and the conversation dropped.

Anna was deeply sensible of the responsibility resting upon her in having to guide her husband's first vague impulses towards a higher life. Some excellent persons she knew, like Messrs. Wentworth and Aguilar, were dissatisfied with her slow method of procedure, and urged the duty of breaking at once and entirely with "a sinful world." Now, she did not believe that sin was confined to one particular section of that world; and feared that by transplanting the neophyte too suddenly to a strange soil, an unaccustomed climate, she might injure his spiritual growth, and produce a discontented formalist instead of a genuine Christian. She saw no merit in a precise and solemn demeanour, in self-invented austerities and rules of conduct; the self-sufficiency often nourished by the restrictive system appeared to her as dangerous as the carelessness commonly engendered by the opposite one; and, adopting the principle that all real reformation works, not from the surface to the centre, but from the centre outwards, she attached very little importance to any external demonstrations.

“Suppose I succeeded,” she would argue, “in wrenching Hyacinth, with his social propensities, from all he considers pleasure, would he straightway become a better man? Would he immediately discover how to fill up the void in his existence, and put his hand to the plough effectually, without preparation, and without looking back? I doubt it most strongly. Deprived of his wonted pursuits, and confined perhaps to a course of strictly devotional observances, before he had acquired the slightest relish for such novel diet, he would soon weary of the restraints imposed, and end by returning with tenfold ardour to his old habits, carrying with him an intense disgust for everything connected with religion. So his last state would be worse than his first. If, on the contrary, he be gradually detached from purely sensuous gratifications, by the substitution of others in which his reason and his conscience may take a part, there is hope that he will abandon from choice, not merely surrender on compulsion, all unworthy occupations. As long as he carries a dead heart in his bosom, what matters it whether the tomb be hung with the sackcloth of the ascetic, or decked with the tinsel of fashion? Let the Spirit

of life once enter into the sepulchre, and he will come forth, like Lazarus, in spite of every bandage wound about him by custom or ignorant zeal."

An infallible sign of the good work being begun within Hyacinth, was exhibited in his ceasing to live wholly for himself. He did not become all at once a miracle of devotedness, "bestow all his goods to feed the poor," and "speak with the tongue of angels;" the sublime heights of self-denial, the crowning grace that inspires an apostle, are not attained by a novice in the path of holiness; but the perception having dawned upon his mind that life had nobler objects than dress, diversion, and the favours of the other sex, he caught readily at the simple formula propounded by his wife: "If you would be good, do good."

He was naturally kind hearted, and prompt to answer any appeal to his liberality; so far the path was smooth to him; but it was a new thing to take thought for others, to search out misery in its hiding place, to give himself trouble for its relief. He did all this now with a perseverance, a patience, a tenderness, that could only flow from a divine source, and was thus insen-

sibly drawn nearer to Him whose work on earth he was learning to imitate.

How the leaven operated exactly, it would be difficult to describe in detail:

"Who ever saw the earliest rose
First open her sweet breast?"

or can explain our growth in physical stature? yet the result is unquestionable. The entire tone of Leycester's mind was changing, new views, new desires, new habits of thought were superseding the old ones; "a new man," in short, to employ the expressive phrase of Scripture, was growing up within him, yet the distinctive features, the individuality of the original creation were preserved, and angels might rejoice over a new-born heir of glory, while men still recognised the volatile and luxurious Hyacinth Leycester.

The line of beneficence which Mr. Leycester chiefly affected was the succour of distressed persons who had known better days, and those afflicted with lingering or incurable maladies. Into the squalid haunts of the very poor, the pestilential dens of London, he had not courage, he declared, to penetrate; but there was a wide field of indigence for him to labour in, without

attempting the more heroic mission, and the softness that made him shrink from the horrors of absolute want, rendered him peculiarly fitted for the task of cheering a consumptive patient, and conveying help to those unused to alms. His gentle step and voice were gladly welcomed in a sick room, while his ready tact and genial courtesy soothed the pride of fallen respectability, and lightened the load of obligation.

In such cases as these he did not spare personal exertion, nor deem his duty complete when he handed over a sum of money for others to distribute, but was careful to ascertain the genuineness of the statements that appealed to his compassion, and indefatigable in the service of those whose claims he had so verified. Very often a pitiful tale in the newspapers, an article, like that in Household Words on "The Quiet Poor," would send him forth on an errand of mercy, which was followed up till the recipients were placed beyond the need of further aid. His neat little brougham (for he could not yet walk any great distance) might be seen almost daily awaiting him in humble streets, where it was popularly believed to be a doctor's. So quietly did he go about these affairs, that few besides

his coachman had any suspicion to whom the vehicle belonged, or whither it transported its occupant.

Later in the afternoon he appeared in the Park, or at his Club, as daintily arrayed as if his toilet were his sole care; and his countenance was none the less cheerful because the sight of it had carried comfort to some poor household, during those hours he had been wont to waste in his dressing-gown over a cigar. If it amused him to spend his evenings at the Opera, or in the society of his equals, instead of listening to some prosy harangue about the condition of the Jews in Japan, or yawning over the lucubrations of the Record, Mrs. Leycester, for one, saw no harm (and excellent taste) in the indulgence.

CHAPTER V.

"Thou know me! in this guise
Thou canst not know me."

WERNER.

WHILE Anna repudiated, both for herself and her husband, the timid virtue which cannot encounter the common temptations of life, but seeks refuge in the nearest approach to a cloister, it is not to be supposed that she watched without apprehension his return to society, where there was much to upset his good resolutions, and seduce him into vices he had forsworn. If he proved able to stand the test, inhaling the perfumed breath of flattery without becoming intoxicated by it, and tasting the lawful fruits of the earthly paradise, without culling forbidden sweets, it was not because opportunity was wanting for the fullest gratification of his vanity and voluptuous tendencies. The world in which he had flourished, received him back again with open arms, and held out every encouragement to

him to rank himself among its most determined votaries.

His popularity with the fair sex seemed rather to increase than diminish; the slight traces of infirmity he still exhibited, were a capital excuse for treating him with more tender familiarity than could be used towards a sturdier hero. If he went to a party he was enthroned on a sofa, round which the prettiest women were sure to be ranged; fair, soft arms were freely offered to facilitate his movements, and all manner of attentions were showered upon him. The most generally credited version of his story was that his injury had been received in the duel with Mr. Bathurst, since which he had disappeared from the fashionable horizon; and this supposition invested him with greater interest than would have attached to any other misfortune, save perhaps the loss of a limb in the Crimea. Nothing, indeed, but that circumstance enabled him to stand his ground against the wan and bearded warriors, who began to struggle back, maimed and exhausted, from the scene of conflict.

It was well for Mr. Bathurst, that he did not mix habitually in the same circle as his quondam antagonist; he would have found himself

regarded as a jealous ogre, who had laid sacrilegious hands upon the public favorite; that hasty expression of his touching his desire to disfigure his adversary had got wind, and done him immense harm in the eyes of Hyacinth's adherents, who transferred all their sympathy from the wronged husband to the wounded lover—as the two were reputed to be. Admirable justice of public opinion! who would not sacrifice every other consideration, divine or human, for the sake of obtaining a verdict from so impartial a tribunal?

Leycester was standing with Dacre one night at the conclusion of the opera, among the crowd which thronged the stairs, when a lady of striking though peculiar beauty, took advantage of a momentary separation from the gentleman in attendance on her, pressed his arm, and said in a low, earnest tone:

“You are quite well now? and happy?”

“Both, I thank you kindly,” replied he, “and you?”

The lady bowed, and rejoining her cavalier, moved on without a second look. Several ladies drew back rather superciliously as she passed.

"Who is Grace's *cher ami* now?" asked Hyacinth.

"My dear fellow, you forget, or didn't you know, that she is married, and leads a life of most edifying propriety?"

"By Jove!" exclaimed Leycester, tip-toeing to catch another glimpse of the couple. "That is her husband then? What sort is he?"

"Good-looking, as you may see; soft in the upper story, as you may suppose; wealthy, as you may be quite certain. She loves her love with a T, because he is Tender; she hates him, I should not wonder, with a T, because he is Tiresome; he took her to the Temple of Hymen, and treats her to Three Thousand pounds yearly. His name is Thorncroft, and he lives in Tyburnia."

"Where Mrs. Thorncroft, I suppose, gives elegant dinners, and is the idol of a select circle."

"No, no; society is not fallen so low as that. Men may go to them, but you never see her in any decent house."

"Society is so little fastidious on some occasions, that one cannot tell whom it may receive or reject. Here is a lady coming down now,

whose conduct has been quite as notorious as Grace More's, with less heart to redeem it, and fewer excuses to offer in palliation; yet nobody avoids her company."

As Hyacinth spoke, Mrs. Fitzmaurice descended the stairs, leaning on Lord Wells's arm; and catching a glimpse of her former admirer, studiously averted her face.

"You can't compare the two," said Dacre, trying to catch Mrs. Fitzmaurice's eye. "*Une femme galante*, who permits herself a certain latitude in the interpretation of the conjugal law, is not to be put on a par with the professional Cyprian, who barterers her favours for gold."

"The mercenary element is certainly a hideous feature in the transaction; but the world is tolerant of that too, in other cases. Look at yonder faded Marchioness, married at seventeen to an old man of seventy; does any discreet matron cast scorn upon the bargain she made?"

"If you were not in a perverse humour, *mon cher*, I should represent to you that a girl who gives her beauty once for all, in exchange for a splendid establishment, is in a different position from one who is ready to repeat the complaisance as often as she finds it profitable."

"Once for all," repeated Leycester; "ah! if it is so . . . However, I don't mean to scandalize Lady Ullesthorpe in particular, nor to become the apologist of a class which, as you know, I never did affect. Only I would like consistency in such matters; and cannot acquiesce in the judgment which presses with such unrelenting severity even upon the penitent *courtesane*, while it applauds the legal sacrifice of youth to Mammon, and is blind to the profligacy of a Mrs. Fitzmaurice."

"Very fine sentiments indeed," cried Dacre; "and now, suppose we get out of this draught. I am going to sup with Mademoiselle Céline; will you come?"

"Thank you. I have done with *danseuses*."

"For the present," added Dacre, maliciously. "By the bye, what has become of your friend Rita?"

Hyacinth shrugged his shoulders, in token of ignorance or indifference. "Can I set you down anywhere?" said he; and receiving a negative reply, he made his way to his carriage, and drove home.

It had never yet happened to him to be claimed as an acquaintance, by any of those who

had known him during his eclipse, as he termed it. He occasionally saw in the Row men whom he had noticed in Leicestershire, mounted on horses that he had helped to sell; but under his altered circumstances, the riders no more recognised him than did their steeds. If now and then his face struck one of them as familiar, the reply to questions about him threw the enquirer off the scent, and convinced him he was mistaken in associating the well-known *élégant* of Park Lane and Hildhurst Lodge, with the stable-yard at Ashby St. Martin. Hyacinth's imperturbable coolness helped still further to dissipate suspicion.

Anna was one day accosted by Sir Charles Dalston, to whom she was obliged to introduce her husband.

"Mr. Leycester, oh! ah!—by Jove! why—I beg your pardon, but I think I have met you before," stammered the baronet, eyeing him curiously, with a dim recollection of "a saucy chap but the lightest hand on a horse he ever knew," who had broken in his famous greys.

"Very possibly," returned Hyacinth, meeting his gaze without the slightest discomposure; "I have often been down hunting in your neighbour-

hood. Fine country. Who do you suppose will hunt it next season?"

Some sporting gossip followed, after which Hyacinth, boldly taking the bull by the horns, remarked:

"That was a very fine pair of horses you were driving yesterday, Sir Charles."

"Well matched, ain't they! Do you know," continued the country gentleman, "when I bought those horses, they were brought to my stable by a young man so like you, that I could almost imagine you the same person."

"Reawully!" cried Hyacinth, with his best drawing room accent. "What a scoundrel! Fancy, Anna, any low fellah having the impertinence to resemble me."

And he laughed with uncounterfeited glee.

"You are a very good whip, I believe; you must try them some day," said Sir Charles thinking to test the point of identity by the skill displayed, for the mare had a peculiarity that a stranger would be sure not to discover at first sight.

Leycester declined on the plea of not being much accustomed to handle the ribbons; but the baronet's persistence revealed the trap to his

quick apprehension, and he suffered himself to be persuaded.

Stipulating that they should take one of the outlying roads, ostensibly, because his nerves were not equal to the crowded streets; really, because he did not want spectators of his intended *maladresse*, he ascended Sir Charles's phaeton, planted himself on the box with the imposing air of an unpractised man wishing to achieve great distinction, fussed over the reins and the harness, addressed the impatient steeds with alternate sternness and supplication, and set off at a brisk pace in the direction of Hampstead. Scorning to keep his own side of the road, he passed other vehicles so closely that it required all the skill of which he actually was master, to avoid a collision. He rattled over stones, swung round corners, raced down hills, and so goaded the mare by pulling at the side of her mouth which he knew was tender, that she turned restive, and threatened to back the whole concern into a ditch. The more she jibbed, the harder he tugged at the bit, till, Sir Charles, losing all patience, snatched the reins, and with some trouble rescued himself and his equipage from the impending danger. Hyacinth resigned his

post with becoming humility, supported under his load of obloquy by the comfortable assurance that his companion would never again mistake him for the accomplished trainer of Ashby St. Martin.

"It is very odd," quoth the baronet to his wife, "I could have sworn to the fellow's face; but such a muff as he turned out could never have earned his bread in a stable, and he certainly did not know those horses I bought of Riddell."

"Besides, was not Riddell's young man killed out hunting one day," suggested Lady Dalston.

"Oh, by George! so he was, or the next thing to it. It was a ridiculous notion of mine, to connect the two together; but the likeness is certainly remarkable."

"What is this story Dalston has got against you, Cinthy?" enquired Dacre, a few days after; "he vows you upset him into a ditch; I thought you were a match for anything equine."

"Equine, perhaps, but not for a she-devil with a wart in the corner of her mouth,—accord-

ing to the groom's account," answered Leycester carelessly. "I told Sir Charles I could not manage the brutes, but he insisted; and driven myself to the task, I drove him to the verge of destruction."

He was coming out of Kensington Gardens one afternoon when the band was playing, Mrs. Leycester being a little way in front, with Captain (now Sir Philip) Lawrance, lately promoted to his father's baronetcy and fortune, when, from among the crowd at the bridge, a young lady made a dart at him, crying in joyful accents:

"Mr. Ryder!"

Hyacinth recognised Miss Ackerman, his former pupil, just in time to avoid a surprise. Keeping an unruffled countenance, he lifted his hat with an air of lofty courtesy, and drawled:

"A mistake, I fancy. I have not the honour of bearing that name."

The girl blushed, and drew back in confusion, to be lectured by her mother, for rushing after strange gentlemen. Hardly convinced of error, she followed Leycester with eager eyes, saw him interchange familiar greetings with the occupants of a coroneted carriage, then hand a well-

dressed woman into an elegant barouche, in which he stretched himself with the *abandon* of a master; upon which she turned away with a sigh, and confessed that her eyes must have deceived her. The rise was too sudden, the change too great. That her fascinating riding master, should have made, or fallen into a fortune, and have a "perfect lady" for his partner, was within the range of possibility; that he should be on intimate terms with members of the British Peerage, appeared to her unsophisticated mind an occurrence too improbable even for a romance. She quickly recovered the shock the apparition had caused her; indeed, a certain young official in the Post-office, with black eyes and the bluest of chins, had inspired her lately with secret wonder, how she could ever have cared for a fair man!

Lawrance had some strange intelligence to impart. He had been inspecting some property of his in Lincolnshire, not very far from Mr. Desart's parish, and had heard very queer stories of that gentleman's domestic habits. It appeared that he retained in his service a housekeeper who had lived with him before his marriage, and that he compelled his step-daughters to associate

with this woman, who was neither by education nor propriety of conduct, a fit companion for them. His wife, by all accounts, was a mere cipher in the household, and so completely under the influence of a superior mind, or of terror, that she never interfered in anything. To the elder Miss Leycester, now a blooming young creature of eighteen, he paid the most devoted attention, leaving no art untried to attach her to himself; with a view, some supposed, of gaining possession of the few thousands that would become hers on reaching her majority; others attributed his assiduities to a still more unworthy motive.

Towards the younger girl he adopted opposite tactics. Whether her youth—she was but sixteen—rendered him less solicitous to conciliate her good opinion, or whether she showed more determination in repelling his advances, and resenting the indignities heaped upon her mother, she was said to receive very different treatment at his hands. While Azalea was flattered and indulged, nothing Camellia said or did, gave satisfaction. It seemed his object to break down, by severity and contumelious treatment, a spirit he might find in

the way of his designs. If she protested, he called her remonstrances froward and petulant; if she appeared indifferent, he pronounced her hardened and obstinate; if, as was not uncommon, she looked depressed, and "moped" silently, then she was sullen and ungrateful! It was whispered that she was often shut up in her room for days together, without fire or candle; and so strict a surveillance was kept up over all three, that not a letter ever reached one of them unopened; while writing materials were positively interdicted, except in Mr. Desart's study, where they were used under his immediate inspection.

Granting that some of these reports were exaggerated or malicious, there must be some foundation of fact for gossip to start from; such tales would hardly be told of a clergyman's family, unless his character lent them a degree of credibility. Confirmation indeed was afforded by his own proceedings. Why were all intercourse and correspondence with the outer world so pertinaciously refused, unless there was something wrong to be concealed? The thought of his young sisters being in the power of such a man stimulated Hyacinth to active interference.

Letters of enquiry or remonstrance would probably be thrown away, if they did not aggravate the mischief; his project was to go down and investigate the state of affairs in person. Mr. Desart might close his own doors, but he could not forbid the village and its environs to all intruders.

"Well, but what will you do if you find things ever so bad," asked Lord Wilfred, to whom Leicester confided his views. "You cannot interpose effectually between a man and his wife."

"I can rescue my sisters from his clutches by taking, if necessary, forcible possession of them; he has no legal authority over *them*; and I can offer my mother the protection of my roof, which, if she choose to accept it, I should like to see him or any one else infringe."

"But, my dear fellow, to do all this, you might have to break into his domicile. He might also bring an action against you for the restitution, at least, of his conjugal rights, and the law, I fear, would not support you in either cause."

"The law!" cried Hyacinth, in high disdain; "let him appeal to it, if he dare. Why, if half the rumours are true that are circulated against

him, we could make such an answer to his complaint as would stamp him with indelible infamy, and furnish a neat case for the ecclesiastical courts. No, Grafton, in such an emergency, the boldest course is the best; these scoundrels always reckon upon the '*timides avis*' of us decent people, and grow more reckless accordingly."

Meeting with little encouragement from Lord Wilfred Grafton, Leycester betook himself to Lord Etheredge, who was rather charmed with the irregularity of the remedy proposed, and entered with much zest into a scheme which was to exert a vigour beyond the law. He had not cared to mix himself up with a troublesome business, involving angry correspondence and the intervention of solicitors; but the prospect of invading an enemy's premises, and carrying off a couple of fair captives in the teeth of their natural guardians, was too tempting to be let slip. He readily agreed to bear Hyacinth company, bringing with him as squire a most imposing Greek, who had travelled all over the East with him, and was not to be scared at any violent proceedings. Leycester's valet, as devoted in his way, was to be of the party; and the two

ladies were to accompany their lords, to afford female countenance and support to the undertaking.

If anything were wanting to inflame the valour of the band, it was supplied by the arrival of an urgent appeal for aid, written in pencil on the flyleaf of a book, and confided by Camellia Leycester to the gardener's boy, whose youthful heart had been won by her beauty and her tears. Details could not be given under the circumstances, but she declared herself to be too wretched for longer endurance, and implored her brother to come to her relief. Hyacinth could not sleep all night, and let no one have any peace till they were fairly under weigh for Lincolnshire.

CHAPTER VI.

"Rumour it abroad,
That Anne, my wife, is very grievous sick;
I will take order for her keeping close."
KING RICHARD III.

THE railway carried our travellers to a town within five miles of Walworth. It was not deemed expedient to proceed further *en masse*, lest undue sensation should be excited in Mr. Desart's vicinity. The ladies, therefore, remained at an hotel, while the gentlemen, in a roomy hired carriage, which Etheredge drove, set off, with their retainers inside, for the scene of action. Conjecture being, by Camellia's letter, pretty well changed into certainty, little time was wasted in preliminary enquiries. According to the plan of operations agreed upon, the vehicle was stopped at the head of the lane leading to the rectory, and Hyacinth walked alone up to the house; for it had been decided to try negotiation before resorting to force, and

Etheredge declared his total inability to speak civilly to the old villain!

In answer to Leycester's summons, a stolid-looking maid stated missus were not at home; ditto the young ladies; nor could she say when they was likely to be in.

"I am Mrs. Desart's son," explained Hyacinth, stepping quietly into the hall, "and have come from a distance to see her; I will wait."

The portress hesitated, but the enemy having actually effected a lodgment, and seeming by no means disposed to surrender his advantage, she gave way, and opening a door near at hand, announced to some one within:

"Please, sir, it be Mrs. Desart's son, and he says he'll wait."

A sound, not as of clerical benediction, reached the visitor's ears, succeeded by the bland injunction:

"Show the gentleman in, Betsy. Mr. Leycester, this is indeed a surprise!"

"I can scarcely hope a pleasant one, sir," replied Hyacinth, contriving not to perceive the hand extended to him; he had a strong aversion to prostitute the tokens of friendship or affec-

tion, and seldom pressed either palm or lip unless he meant something by it. "The total cessation of all intercourse between us, and the tone adopted towards me by my mother, with your concurrence, if not at your instigation, prove that I am not so fortunate as to stand high in your esteem."

"I thought it my duty" began his involuntary host.

"To let the prodigal perish amidst the ruin he had invited," interrupted Leycester, "and to inculcate hatred of those nearest in blood as the surest evidence of Christianity. Precisely; that, we know, is how some men interpret the New Testament. But my present errand is not to renew old grievances. Believing that, in spite of all misunderstandings, my mother could not be otherwise than pleased to greet me, I have employed my recovered strength in journeying hither, and trust to be forgiven the intrusion."

"I only wish you had written beforehand to signify your intention," said Mr. Desart, with the half abstracted air of a person who speaks to gain time for consideration.

"I dare say you do," thought Hyacinth.

"We might then have arranged to accommo-

date you," pursued the rector, pausing again to elicit a response indicative of his visitor's intended stay.

"Thank you, that is of no consequence," was all the answer he obtained.

Now, had Leycester alleged the necessity of returning the same day, Mr. Desart would have lamented that the ladies were away on a visit at a distant friend's, where they would sleep; but if the young man had time at his disposal, it was no use putting him off with a fable of that description.

While the rector debated on what plea to prevent an interview to which he had strong objections, Hyacinth caught sight of a female figure in the garden, and saying, "There is one of the ladies within call, I think," opened the window, stepped out, and was clasped in a fond embrace, before a word could be said in opposition.

"So, my sweet sister, we have met again at last," said Mr. Leycester, surveying her ripened charms with fond admiration. "Perhaps my mother is not farther from home than yourself?"

Azalea hesitated, and looked at her step-father.

"Is the question too complicated for one person to answer?" continued Hyacinth.

"Fetch me my hat, Azalea, my love," interposed Mr. Desart; "your brother will like to take a turn round the garden."

"Excuse me," returned Cinthy, retaining his hold of the damsel, "I am far less impatient to inspect the grounds, than to behold the other members of my family. There seems a difficulty about obtaining access to her which my mother was not wont to make."

"The fact is," began Mr. Desart (as people generally do when they meditate a fiction), "her health has been so much impaired of late, that she is unequal to doing the honors of her house, so that she is always denied to chance visitors—a conventional deception, which injures no one, and averts much tedious explanation."

"I am glad to find the convenient practice sanctioned by so high an authority," remarked Leycester, bowing deferentially; "but as I may fairly claim not to be classed with ordinary callers, I trust the rule will be somewhat relaxed in my favor."

Mr. Desart looked grave, and was almost

afraid that the excitement would be prejudicial; but Hyacinth maintained so strenuously that no parent, however critical her condition, could be the worse for admitting a peaceably-disposed son, and showed so unmistakable a determination to gain his point, that the rector was compelled to temporize.

"Well," said he, "I will go and see how your mother is, and whether her nerves are strong enough to bear the shock. Azalea, dearest, come with me. Your feminine tact will assist me in preparing our beloved invalid for this unexpected meeting."

"Oh! I cannot spare my sister, Mr. Desart. She must keep me company during your absence."

It was contrary to Mr. Desart's design, to leave his unwelcome guest alone with any member of the household; but there seemed no help for it; and Azalea was perhaps less likely to be indiscreet than the rest. He gave her a warning glance, and withdrew. Hyacinth led her a little way further from the house, to escape eaves-droppers, and plunged immediately into the subject that pre-occupied him. Was she happy? What was the matter with Mrs. De-

sart? Did things go on as they should? Where was Camellia?

To all which, the young lady replied, in the same hurried way, that she did not altogether like the life she led; that Mr. Desart was very kind to her, but she could not think he behaved well to poor mainma, who was not exactly ill, though . . . though she was odd at times; the speaker meant by that, that mamma sometimes talked strangely, and afterwards forgot what she had said; was very merry at one moment, and cried about nothing the next. As to dear Melie, she really was rather hardly treated; it made Azalea wretched to see her sister always in trouble; she could not tell how it happened; Mr. Desart seldom found fault with *her*, but Camellia had conceived a strong prejudice against him, and showed it, which probably annoyed him. Some how or other, the two were perpetually at variance, and the poor girl passed half her days shut up in her room. She was there now: that was her window. But don't say I told you anything about these things," added Azalea, casting a frightened glance around her.

"Trust me," answered Hyacinth. "But now

one word, for we have no time to spare. This house is no place for you: will you leave it with me—to-day—within the hour? I cannot doubt Camellia's willingness."

"I should be very glad," said the startled girl, "but will papa permit . . . ?"

"I charge myself with that concern," interrupted her brother.

"But mamma . . . "

"Shall accompany you, if she will. But should she hesitate, her scruples need not bind you. I have reasons for removing you from this man's guardianship, and for doing it at once. If you believe that I have your truest interests at heart, don't wait to marvel at the oddity of the proposal, but when we rejoin Mr. Desart, who is now crossing the lawn to meet us, go quietly to your room, put together such necessaries as you can collect, and hold yourself and Melie in readiness to start when I give the signal."

Hyacinth was half sorry to observe how little flurried Azalea contrived to look when they encountered her step-father; it showed greater practice in dissimulation than was quite desirable for so young a person. The rector, who

scrutinized her pretty sharply, saw nothing suspicious in her mien; and proceeded to announce his wife's readiness to receive her son. "Only, as her nerves are very weak," added he, "I must beg you not to introduce any topics of an exciting nature."

"I engage not to talk politics or theology," returned Leycester, demurely; "neither Crimean mismanagement, nor credence-tables shall form the subject of our discourse; and if you deem it unadvisable, I will not even allude to the latest scandal."

Mr. Desart's eye kindled as if he detected a covert sarcasm in the last phrase; but deeming it useless to bandy words with one of Hyacinth's stamp, he conducted him without further remark to Mrs. Desart's apartment.

The young man had not anticipated a very warm reception; he was therefore not discouraged by the constraint of his mother's manner, while Azalea's hints helped to explain the sad change observable in her personal appearance. It was not merely that she looked more aged than the lapse of time warranted,—ill-health or anxiety might have effected that alteration; nor that her attire was neglected; a

person who dresses merely for show is apt to slur over the duties of the toilet when no spectators are to be impressed: there were unmistakable signs in poor Mrs. Desart's countenance of an indulgence to which weak minds are often driven by trouble. A vice, from which his very vanity, sublimed to the pitch of self-respect, had preserved the son in his day of trial, was become the habitual solace of the equally vain, but not equally fastidious mother, who carried her refinement, as she carried her feelings and principles, no deeper than the surface.

We have seen how heedlessly she rushed into a marriage which promised her no great increase of comfort or consideration; it soon became evident that she had lost her independence, and thrown herself out of the sphere in which she delighted, without gaining one single advantage. Her second husband had not the grace to conceal his indifference towards her personally, or his contempt for her understanding; and exercised in the most galling way, the power vested in him by the law, over herself, her children, and her fortune. Shut up in a lonely village, with no external sources of amusement, insulted by the presence and demeanour of a female who

usurped her functions, uneasy about her young daughters, deprived of the support and sympathy of her elder children, with no friend to advise, no wisdom to guide, no energy to resist, and no faith to console, she abandoned herself completely to her fate, and sought only to drown the recollection of her cares.

The degrading resource furnished a plausible excuse for the seclusion in which she was kept, and rendered her still less capable of counteracting Mr. Desart's designs. Cowed by his threats, she wrote, under his dictation, whatever he chose to her perishing son and her anxious daughters. Provided, indeed, the coveted stimulus were supplied, she seemed to grow heedless of what befell herself or any one else; and the tears she occasionally shed, were the effect less of grief than of intoxication.

A twinge of natural feeling pierced her dulled senses at the sight of her favorite child; but her embarrassment was not due so much to remorse for her cruel neglect, as to the stern warning she had just received, to beware how she made any complaints, or satisfied his curiosity. To all his questions, which in Mr. Desart's presence were necessarily vague, she returned only gene-

ral answers, nor could he rouse her to a show of interest in any subject. When he said that his wife and sister were in the neighbourhood, and would have accompanied him had they been assured of a welcome, she merely replied, they were very kind, without expressing any wish in the matter.

He then represented the pleasure it would give them, if she would consent to pay them a visit; to which her husband answered that the exertion would be too great for her in her delicate state, and she eagerly confirmed his opinion. In vain Hyacinth urged the benefit of change, the opportunity of obtaining the best medical advice; she appeared half scared at the proposal.

"You will not, however, refuse us the girls' company?" he said at last, endeavouring to look unconscious of the impending crisis. "They ought not to grow up strangers to their nearest kindred; and that reminds me that I have not seen Camellia yet. Where is she?"

Mrs. Desart hesitated and turned towards the rector, who shook his head, and deplored the contumacy of that young lady, which made it impossible for him to permit her appearance in the drawing-room. What was her offence? Oh,

he did not wish to enter into details that might lower her in the eyes of her family, but it was necessary to keep a tight hand over her; and, seeing Hyacinth inclined to insist, he added, that he could not suffer his rules to be infringed.

Leycester was rejoiced at this offer of battle, and candidly stated that if Mr. Desart expected him to go away without a sight of his young sister, that gentleman was very much mistaken. The declaration, as he rather hoped, moved the rector to pronounce an unqualified negative, whereupon Hyacinth had a right to give way to his impatience, and vow that if the damsel were not brought down to him forthwith, he would search the house till he found her; nor when he found, did he mean to part with her in a hurry; for reasons which he went on to explain with very little reserve or circumlocution.

Mr. Desart was equally astonished and enraged at the charges brought against him; he could not conceive how the secrets of his *ménage* had leaked out, except through Azalea during the last few minutes; and instead of repelling the accusation, he broke out into a fierce invective upon the supposed denouncer.

"You may spare your abuse," said Hyacinth,

coolly. "I do not depend upon the testimony of a girl whose innocence would prevent her comprehending her own danger, or the full extent of others' wrongs. If you can deny that one sister is liable to have her mind corrupted by being forced into daily contact with a woman of blemished reputation, while the other's young life is rendered miserable by your severity, I am ready to hear your defence; if not, be silent, and surrender at once a charge you have so grossly abused.

"As to you, madam," he continued, after a momentary pause, turning to his mother, "I hardly know how to explain, or (if I may venture to say so) excuse your supineness in a matter touching you so nearly. It may have been proper, or expedient, for you to submit to the indignities heaped upon yourself; that is a question I do not pretend to decide; but surely a mother should have interfered for the protection of her offspring."

Here Mrs. Desart began to cry in a helpless way, and her lord, having recovered breath, put in his word.

"These moral lectures come with an excellent grace from you, sir, whose dissolute habits noto-

riously compelled your own wife to forswear your company. Yet, after all the scandal you have yourself created, you presume to preach to us of conjugal obligations, and favour your mother with strictures upon her conduct as a parent! Truly you are a proof how much she needed assistance in the task of bringing up children; and I do not think," [this was spoken emphatically, with pointed reference to the lady] "she will prefer you to me as a guide of youth."

"Oh, Cinthy, how can you?" was the not over intelligible response to this appeal.

"My errors are no apology for yours, Mr. Desart," said Leycester with a heightened color, but a calm voice. "I do not seek to palliate them, nor institute a comparison between us, which, however, would not, I fancy, turn out to my disadvantage. I am not alone in this matter. My wife, who has had the magnanimity to forgive what really was faulty in my conduct, and accept an explanation of what was misunderstood, is ready to share with me the responsibility I propose to undertake, and is now waiting with my sister, Lady Etheredge, to receive their expected guests."

"Lady Etheredge, indeed, is a most fit person

to inculcate female duty and propriety," sneered the rector.

Hyacinth suppressed a strong inclination to shake him, and said: "We may as well terminate a discussion likely to provoke animosity. I have stated my demands in plain terms; tell me as bluntly, whether you will accede to the same, or whether I must depend upon myself for their enforcement?"

"I must refer you to your mother for an answer," returned Mr. Desart, with an air of dignified impartiality. "How say you, Flora? Are you content to see these unformed girls withdrawn from your tutelage, and confided to a runaway wife and daughter, backed by a couple of wild young men?"

But Mrs. Desart only sobbed afresh, and declined to adjudicate.

"I am sure I don't know what to say. It's little comfort I have of any of my children. I dare say Cinthy means well, and the girls were always very fond of him; but you do what you think best, dear Richard; you are always right."

"Then," said Richard, "I decidedly refuse my consent, and would recommend this valiant

knight to concern himself no further with affairs that do not belong to him. He will be for carrying *you* off next?"

"It is not my design to put any force upon my mother's inclinations—"

"Oh, you are very kind!" ejaculated the rector.

"Though should she think fit to claim the shelter of my roof, now or at any future time, it will be gladly extended to her; and so I beg you, madam, to understand and remember. With regard to my sisters, my resolution is unalterable; they quit this house with me, and the sooner the better."

"You are no doubt provided with a rope-ladder, and all the requisite implements of abduction," said Mr. Desart, confronting Hyacinth as he made a step towards the door; "for I have one damsel safe under lock and key; and should you be so ill-advised as to lay a finger on the other, you might chance to get a blow from a garden spade, which would spoil your beauty."

"You do me but justice," smiled Hyacinth, while Mrs. Desart set up a piteous shriek, "in supposing that I did not trust myself wholly unprotected in your reverend hands."

And so saying, he passed into the hall, threw open the door, and whistled long and loud. Before the sound ceased, the rumble of wheels was heard, and Lord Etheredge, weary of inaction, drove down the lane at a spanking pace. The carriage stopped at the gate; the two men got out, and stood, the Englishman with a resolute, the Greek with a warlike aspect, awaiting further orders.

"You see my forces," said Hyacinth, turning to Mr. Desart, whose blank face was good to behold. "Demetri yonder will give an excellent account of the gardener and his spade; my brother-in-law will knock down any man, lay or ecclesiastic, and otherwise disarm any number of women; while Anderson will do anything, short of regicide, at my bidding. I put it to you whether you will create a scandal in your house and parish, by obliging us to break in doors and commit a series of assaults, or resign yourself to necessity, and give up the girls without further trouble?"

"You shall answer for this, sir, depend upon it," said the rector between his set teeth. "I cannot resist you for the moment; there is no policeman here, to whose custody I can deliver

you and your ruffianly followers; but if there be law in England, I will make you feel its weight."

"Meanwhile, to avoid damage to property, suppose you hand over the key of Camellia's apartment," was Leycester's calm rejoinder.

The baffled man flung it at him, and retired, muttering threats that need not be recorded.

"You may come in, Etheredge, and pay your respects to the mistress, if you please," shouted the victor, and sped away up the stairs to accomplish his work.

Azalea met him, pale and tearful, having listened in much trepidation to the colloquy below, the heads of which she had reported to her sister through the keyhole. The prisoner was therefore prepared to rush at her brother when he appeared at the threshold, and hang herself, like a triumphal garland, round his neck, bedewing his face with a vehement gush of moisture from her eyes, crying, laughing, talking, and kissing, all at the same time. She looked thin and harassed, but Hyacinth did not pause to pity or enquire. He desired them to put on their bonnets, summoned Anderson to carry down the portmanteau, in which they hastily stowed a

few necessary articles, and conducted them into the parlour to take leave of their mother, on whom, meanwhile, Lord Etheredge had been trying his powers of persuasion, to cast in her lot with her children.

"My dear lady," argued he, "you've made a bad business of this second match, that's clear. You never can get the lead of such a vicious brute as you have to deal with. Why not pay forfeit; take your chance, I mean, of what he may do, or the world may say, and have done with him at once? Among us all, you might surely find as comfortable a home as this."

Nothing, however, was to be got out of Mrs. Desart but sighs and lamentations. She could not make up her mind to seize the opportunity of escape thus afforded her; all manner of scruples and difficulties perplexed her. It would be so very odd; she had not a bonnet fit to be seen in; she didn't like doing things in a hurry; and so forth.

Etheredge shrugged his broad shoulders in despair; whether fear of Mr. Desart, or downright indolence, were at the bottom of her hesitation, he could not divine, but there was no combating such frivolous objections. He was

relieved when Hyacinth entered with the girls; and though a little disappointed at the peaceable upshot of the affair, was not, on the whole, ill-pleased when they were safely deposited in the carriage, to the top of which he mounted, and lighting a fresh cigar, drove triumphantly home.

CHAPTER VII.

"Juan was something she could not divine,
Being no sybil in the new world's ways;
Yet was she nothing dazzled by the meteor,
Because she did not pin her faith on feature."
DON JUAN.

"See what delights in sylvan scenes appear!
Descending Gods have found Elysium here.
In woods bright Venus with Adonis stray'd,
And chaste Diana haunts the forest shade."
POPE.

A CHEERFUL party, as may well be supposed, assembled that evening at the Railway Hotel, where Lady Etheredge and Mrs. Leycester awaited the result of the gentlemen's expedition. The three sisters, who had not met for nearly four years, were in a high state of excitement. There was much to tell and to hear on all sides; but the tale of the juniors took precedence. From the accounts they gave of Mr. Desart's interior, the petty persecutions endured by one, the artful cajoleries practised upon the other, the contemptuous disregard of their mother, the

jealous seclusion in which all were kept, it was pretty evident that rumour had not surpassed the truth, nor even, perhaps, reached its full measure.

It was tacitly understood to be desirable that before the young people too much stress should not be laid upon the perils and tribulations they had escaped; but the elders exchanged many a glance at the narration of manœuvres, the purport of which was more intelligible to them than to the inexperienced relators. Azalea they were glad to see, appeared scarcely less pleased at the change of quarters than Camellia, though having fewer grievances to complain of, she did not look upon it so much in the light of deliverance from oppression; and, being of a more placid temperament, indulged in no such transports of delight.

The sole drawback to Camellia's felicity was the idea of her mother's loneliness. Azalea doubted if she would miss them. Hyacinth and Lord Etheredge repeated what they had said to induce her to emancipate herself, and promised not to abandon the attempt, if written exhortations were likely to avail: but they could not take up her cause with-

was open to her at any time to summon assistance, as Camellia, with fewer opportunities, had done.

In her turn, Lady Etheredge entertained her sisters with an account of her foreign wanderings, and of the two little cherubs in her nursery at home, whose acquaintance they had to make. While Azalea sat entranced in this last absorbing theme, Camellia strayed to the sofa on which Hyacinth lay stretched, and taking possession of a stool at his feet, gave herself up to fond contemplation of the brother who had been from child, hood her divinity and *beau idéal*. It had not yet entered into her youthful imagination to conceive any one more graceful, more brilliant, more engaging, and just now the contrast between his soft smile and the harsh countenance she had been lately in the habit of beholding, filled her with new admiration. She held his hands in hers, and fell into her old raptures over their rosy tips; examined all the ornaments on his watch chain; and overwhelmed him with questions: "Why did Mrs. Leycester make you lie down? Are you tired? Have you been ill? What have you been doing all these years?" to which he

gave replies just circumstantial enough to appease her curiosity.

"Why don't you wear a moustache, Cinthy?" was her final enquiry, as she twisted his long "wings" round her finger. "Every one does now."

"A sufficient reason why I should not," answered he. "Besides, it would hide the shape of my mouth, Miss Camellia, and interfere with its primary office."

"What, eating soup?" interposed Lord Etheredge, throwing down the newspaper with a yawn. "It is deuced awkward, dipping a lot of hair into every spoonful."

"Barbarian!" ejaculated Hyacinth. "Is soup the chief refreshment of man's existence?"

"Oh! if you mean women," cried the ex-Lifeguardsman, "I would back my moustache against your shaven lip to any extent. Miss Camellia shall be the umpire."

But Camellia, with a girl's shyness, hid her face in Hyacinth's waistcoat; Veronica, who had not heard the discussion, repulsed his offered salute with an indignant "Don't, Etheredge!" Anna pleaded a natural prejudice on the other

side; Azalea showed fight. Hyacinth laughed heartily at these successive discomfitures.

"So much for your boasted superiority," cried he. "Why, these ladies will let me kiss them all round."

"Oh! I dare say," retorted Etheredge; "except your wife, they are all your sisters, so it is not a fair test."

"You proposed it yourself; and the law places relationship by affinity and consanguinity on the same footing; according to which sapient regulation, my sisters need not decline your embrace more than mine, if they liked you as well. As to our respective consorts, I defy any one to affirm that Mrs. Leycester ever said, 'Don't, Cinthy!' when I was pleased to bestow upon her a token of endearment."

The lady in question rolled up her needlework, and remarked: "In my opinion, it is a great piece of extravagance to pay for sleeping-rooms if we don't mean to make use of them. I am going to bed."

On the morrow, the little party separated Lord and Lady Etheredge, with the two girls and the servants going straight to London, while Mr. and Mrs. Leycester struck off from the main

line "to visit a friend in Leicestershire," whom they did not think it necessary further to particularise. Hyacinth had been seized with a desire to pay that mark of attention to the excellent Mr. Weston, of whom he had heard nothing for some time past.

On reaching Ashby St. Martin, where they were careful not to put up at the White Hart, he sallied forth to call upon his old doctor; but the house formerly inhabited by him had passed into other hands, and a strange name replaced the brass plate he expected to see. In answer to his enquiries, he was directed to a substantial red-brick tenement, with a strip of garden front and rear, standing a little way back from the main street.

A tidy maid opened the door. "Master was sure to be home in a minute to dinner. Would he walk in?" Hyacinth followed her into a neat parlour, well lined with books. He had not long to wait before Mr. Weston appeared, the picture of health and contentment, and highly gratified on discovering who was his visitor.

Little had the worthy surgeon thought, when exerting himself so benevolently on behalf of a lonely and helpless sufferer, that he was laying

the foundation of his own fortune! Yet so it proved. The five hundred pounds placed in his hands by his grateful patient had enabled him to enter into partnership with a medical man of some repute in the county round, whose advancing years rendered it difficult for him to keep up an increasing connexion. In the wider sphere to which Mr. Weston was thus introduced, his abilities soon gained him a reputation which his amiable character helped to establish. Business flowed in upon him, till a day came when he ceased to mourn over his solitary hearth. He was now in a position to ask the hand of a pretty, lady-like girl, for whom he had long sighed in secret, the daughter of a neighbouring yeoman, who readily gave his consent, and a comfortable dowry into the bargain. With this assistance, the house had been taken and fitted up; the young wife was well skilled in household arts, which she was not too fine to practise; so that her husband's income both sufficed for their moderate wishes, and enabled them to look forward without dismay to a period when they would have other mouths to feed.

Hyacinth begged to be presented to the good genius who had so effectually banished the cloud

from Mr. Weston's benign brow; and found her a cheerful, unaffected woman, who did credit to her husband's taste, and was capable of appreciating his worth. Their invitation to partake the meal about to be served, Leycester declined with thanks; but engaged them to sup at the Dalston Arms. The afternoon he spent in revisiting his old haunts.

The Westons arrived about eight, when the doctor's labours for the day were over, and were welcomed with a cordiality which soon made the lady feel at home with her entertainers. Mrs. Leycester had thought it advisable to warn her fascinating spouse against trying to turn the young matron's head; but he protested his innocence of any such nefarious design, and indeed the associations connected with the locality tended to subdue his spirits and indispose him to idle gallantry. He laid himself out to amuse Mrs. Weston on the same principle that he regaled her with the choicest repast the establishment could furnish, doing the honors of his temporary abode with his best grace.

Mr. Weston was a little curious to ascertain what impression this polished man of the world would produce upon his simple-minded consort.

She was less struck than he expected with that charm of person and manner which affected even himself. That rare symmetry of form was lost upon an eye untrained to observe and compare; and she was puzzled rather than enchanted by the playful humour, the candid conceit, the quiet tone of high breeding, of which she had seen no previous example. Mr. Leycester was very polite and agreeable, she said, but not manly enough to her fancy; it was a woman's province to be ornamental, a man's merits should be of those that pass show. Mrs. Leycester seemed very fond of him, so he had his good qualities, no doubt; but for her part she thought a husband should be wise and strong, a protector to whom one could cling for support, a ruler to whom one could look up with respect, a guide whom one could follow with confidence; not a toy to play with, an artist's model to hang drapery on, or even a pet to cherish and endow with one's spare affection.

Mr. Weston was not dissatisfied with these sentiments in the abstract, but he put in a word for the individual under consideration. "If Mr. Leycester," said he, "possesses something of a woman's weakness, he also shares some of her

finer attributes. He has the delicate perceptions, the tenderness of heart which distinguish your sex, my dear Ellen; and I have seen him, in very trying circumstances, display a power of patient endurance that is almost exclusively feminine. The class to which he belongs may not be the highest, but as a specimen of that class he is unique; a gem of no great price, perhaps, but perfect in its kind."

"A gem—yes, that is what he resembles," cried the lady, "beautiful, sparkling, costly, a thing of no use, and of purely conventional value; but I would have a man like iron, plain, solid, apt for all the purposes of life; or like gold, bright, pure, and incorruptible."

"Well, well," responded the doctor, "metals and jewels have each their merits and defects. Let us remember, Ellen, that the same Hand formed them both."

Jewels, metaphorical and literal, rose somewhat in Mrs. Weston's estimation a few weeks later, when a parcel arrived from London, containing first a complete assortment of every article included in a baby's wardrobe, and secondly, a handsome brooch, which was Mr. Leicester's special tribute to the wife of his benefactor.

After Hyacinth's return to town (when he was nearly torn to pieces by the obstreperous joy of Ben Mio, who had been inconsolable at the separation), a family council was held to decide on the future custody of the Misses Leicester. Hyacinth, with his wife's consent, professed himself willing to assume the entire charge, and his elder sisters made no objection, Mrs. Aguilar having a young brood of her own, while Lady Wilfred Grafton had no settled home; but Veronica pleaded hard for Azalea's company, and there seemed no reason for denying her request. As to Camellia, Hyacinth was decidedly of opinion that she should be placed for a year or two at a superior school, where she might complete her rather neglected education. The first care, however, of her relatives was to fatten her up, and obliterate the recollection of unkindness and injustice; so, pending the search for an eligible preceptress, she visited about from one house to another, gaining benefit to her health and spirits from all.

By the time these affairs were settled, Leicester began to grow weary of the metropolis. It was no use remaining there unless he entered into its festivities; yet attendance at theatres

and crowded parties involved more fatigue than he was well able to undergo. Nor did he experience now that insatiable craving for excitement which afflicts the unemployed portion of society. In his enforced retirement, he had learned to read, to think, and to create for himself an interest in other objects than those supplied from day to day by intercourse with fellow triflers; and though he had by no means lost his relish for the pleasures only to be procured in great cities, he had discovered that it was possible to exist without them. Anna, seeing him droop and grow languid, was too glad to adopt any measure that promised to revive him; and they only awaited one event before removing to Hildhurst.

This was a fête which the new baronet, Sir Philip Lawrance, insisted on giving them at Richmond, where he had hired a very pretty villa for the season. But for Cinthy, he said, he should now be a seedy vagabond, damaged in character and burdened with debt, instead of stepping into an unencumbered fortune, which he was cured of the propensity to throw away over the green baize. Leycester in vain disclaimed the credit attached to his interposition;

Lawrance was determined to see a guardian angel in him, and he had no resource but to receive, like an affable divinity, the incense offered at his shrine. In his honour especially this entertainment was conceived; he could not withhold the light of his countenance.

The Etheredges and Miss Leycester, Mr. Sinclair, Lord Wells, the beautiful Mrs. Agnew, and her almost equally handsome sister, formed the party, on the composition of which Lawrance rather piqued himself, as containing a due proportion of married and single folks, a sufficient infusion of aristocracy, and an uncommon amount of personal charms. Of Mrs. Leycester's winning grace, and Lady Etheredge's vivid bloom, we have already sought to give an idea; Azalea, like most of her family, was a blonde, with a waxen complexion, and an abundance of soft, fair hair, which she disposed after a very becoming fashion in broad open plaits, framing a set of pretty little childish features. There was much of the simplicity of childhood in her character; with a gentle temper, and no great breadth of intellect, she was ready to take people on trust, and accept things as she found them. Yielding to a certain point, she had a

sub-stratum of quiet obstinacy; but too timid for open resistance, she took refuge, when hard pressed, in duplicity, the two-edged weapon of the weak. She attached herself easily, and was capable of faithful and tender devotion, but her feelings never deepened to intensity, and the language of passion roused no echo in her soul.

In contrast with this young Hebe, stood Venus Victrix, the undisputed queen of beauty, reigning under the modest title of Mrs. Agnew, a woman whom no one ever succeeded in painting, either with the brush or the pen, because it was impossible to gaze at her with the calmness essential to correct observation. How could paper or canvass give an adequate idea of that finely-moulded form, its voluptuous contour, its flexible grace? of that majestic carriage, so wholly free from stiffness or studied effect; of those blue-grey eyes, that glanced, now archly, now softly, from under their dark lashes, lighting up mirth, or kindling emotion in the beholder? Her classic head was crowned with roll upon roll of nearly black hair, which, when unbound, descended in wavy tresses below her knees. It was no wonder she walked so lightly and firmly upon that arched instep, or that the mere touch of such a hand thrilled

through to your very heart. Yet her unrivalled beauty was only one of her many attractions. She had travelled a great deal, had read much, and could give an excellent account of what she had seen and learned. You could listen to her by the hour, so easy and animated was the flow of her narratives; and if she spoke of persons, a few happily-chosen words imparted a clearer idea of the individual mentioned than pages of minute description. Then she sang, in a low, sweet voice, poetry and music being sometimes of her own composition; waltzed *à ravir*; rode fearlessly; was a better shot than her husband in the Rifle Brigade; and surpassed most rivals in every branch of feminine industry. Add to all this, that she possessed a warm heart, a disposition so generous that no provocation could draw from her an unkind word, a discretion that, in the midst of manifold temptations, defied calumny, and you have still but a faint conception of what Nature had done for her most favored daughter.

Miss Dunne's style of beauty was of a severer cast. Very tall and erect, with a noble profile, immense brown eyes, not shaded, but as it were crested, with long curved lashes, lips perfect in

outline but wanting in fullness, and a figure that had not yet lost the angularity often characteristic of girlhood, she looked a Diana, with a promise of expanding into a Juno. Brought up in a strange, wild way, she was wonderfully fresh and unconventional. The ordinary studies and pursuits of her sex she did not affect; a shrewd mother-wit stood her in stead of application, while her one accomplishment was horsemanship. There she distanced all competitors; no professional *écuyère* was more thoroughly at home in the saddle; no English foxhunter showed more nerve; no Arab of the desert more knowledge and command of his steed. And yet there was nothing masculine in her demeanour, she was particularly quiet in a room; and you might talk to her for a whole evening without discovering any evidence of the "stable mind."

So much for the ladies of the party; the gentlemen, on their side, were all more or less renowned for external gifts, except Mr. Sinclair, and *les beaux yeux de sa cassette* were considered to be an ample compensation for any little deficiencies in the outward man; besides which he was extremely good natured, clever, and entertaining.

"I asked him and Wells, with an eye to Miss Dunne," explained their host to Hyacinth, "she says she means to make a brilliant match, so there's wealth and rank for her to choose from."

"Don't you put yourself *sur les rangs*?"

The young baronet gave his head a knowing jerk.

"Not I," said he, "I admire her vastly, but she's too muscular for me. By Jove! I believe she would horsewhip a man if he gave her occasion!"

"An awful consideration, truly," cried Leicester, laughing. "I hope the Marquis will get her; she would wake him up, perhaps, and do him good. Meanwhile, O prince, show us over your dominions."

The entrance-hall of the villa was also a museum, adorned with stuffed birds and beasts, cases of insects, skeletons of fish, weapons, Indian toys, savage manufactures, and miscellaneous articles from all quarters of the globe, besides some pictures, which had an equal claim to be reckoned as curiosities. The spacious drawing-room, glittering with mirrors and gilding, opened on one side into a conservatory stocked with choice flowers and over-run with creepers;

while from a bow window on the other, you stepped into a garden in which every inch of space had been turned to the best advantage. There was a lawn with its trim flower-beds and tiny fountain; there were winding walks odorous with syringa and other blossoming shrubs; a miniature park, with tall trees, and a curious imitation of loneliness about it; a paddock, in which a Brahmine bull was grazing; and a kiosk overlooking the river, which flowed tranquilly past the boundary of this little domain.

In such a place, with such companions, a summer afternoon was not found long or wearisome. When the sun began to decline, dinner was served in a cool saloon, supported by scagliola columns. Nothing was set on the table but fanciful silver baskets, and glass stands, containings bonbons, dried fruits, and confectionary. The more substantial viands, imagined by a *chef* of distinction, were handed round by four solemn, noiseless figures in black—a sort of modern genii, Slaves of the Plate. When the repast was concluded, the whole party rose, and adjourned to the kiosk, where coffee and liqueurs were brought to them; and on the veranda outside of which, some of the gentlemen regaled themselves, by permis-

sion, with a fragrant cigarette, while the ladies reclined on the sofas, watching the last gleams of light on the water, and the boats that skimmed its smooth surface.

The chill that follows sunset drove them back to the drawing-room, where the lamps were already lighted, and a tea equipage that it was a pleasure to drink out of, was set forth. The tables were strewed with new publications, literary and pictorial, and a grand piano stood invitingly open. Mrs. Agnew, and Mrs. Leycester alternately delighted their audience, one with notes crisp and sparkling, like champagne, the other with tones rich and luscious, like liquid honey. This was an occasion when Hyacinth, who seldom sang in public, did not object to add his sweet voice to the concert; he performed the duet "*Sí la Stanchezza*" from *Il Trovatore*, with Mrs. Agnew in a style which left little to be desired.

The pleasantest of entertainments must draw to a close. Mrs. Agnew and her sister, Lord Wells and Mr. Sinclair, returned to town; the rest of the party slept at the villa, partook of a breakfast as *recherché* as the dinner of the even-

ing before, and took their departure about mid-day, loaded with grapes and bouquets.

"I hope you appreciate the significance of that gift, Azalea," said Hyacinth, observing her receive a handful of syringa from Sir Philip. "It signifies, or ought to signify, advanced courtship."

"Ought, why?" said the baronet, looking slightly confused.

"Because it is the next thing to orange blossom, the recognised type of marriage."

Azalea disputed the interpretation, but was not prepared with a better; Lawrance, recovering his self-possession, gallantly begged she would at least understand it as a tribute of respectful admiration; and the care she took of those particular flowers, showed she attached more than common interest to them.

"I don't think Azalea will trouble the Etheredges long for a home," said Leycester to his wife as they drove home. "Our host is visibly smitten; don't you agree with me, Anna?" and he adduced one or two signs that he considered symptomatic.

Anna had not observed. In fact she had been too much taken up watching her husband's flirtation with Mrs. Agnew.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Ah! que vous aimez peu, vous autres hommes! Quand ce n'est pas le vice qui vous dessèche l'âme, c'est la vertu; et de toutes façons, lâches ou sublimes, vous n'aimez que vous-mêmes."

GEORGES SAND.

HYACINTH had devoted much silent attention of late to the state of the Etheredge household, and was not altogether satisfied with the result of his investigation. How, he asked himself, had that marriage, so hastily contracted, turned out? Had chance, destiny, good fortune, effected everything that prudence, forethought, and discrimination could have effected? Perhaps so, but in matters matrimonial that is not saying much. Who may reckon on a young man's constancy? Who can tell a girl of eighteen what her opinions may be, when experience has come to the aid of imagination? and if the profoundest calculations are often disappointed, is it wonderful

that more reckless players should sometimes miss their game?

Lord Etheredge was a man, who, if he took a whim into his head, must gratify it at any cost. In the most important, as in the most trifling concerns of life, he cared less for the object than for the triumph of success. Veronica Leycester, in the first blush of her beauty, appeared to him the most desirable specimen of womanhood he had ever met with; to possess her, he was ready to brave all hazards, surmount all obstacles, employ any expedients, make any sacrifice, even to the acceptance of the conjugal yoke. This last point conceded, however, his difficulties were not great; it might almost seem that he exaggerated them to himself to enhance the pleasure of victory. Whatever opposition his wishes might have encountered from his own family, there was certainly little to be apprehended from the lady's. Veronica, girl-like, elated at her conquest, allured by the dignity of marriage, the glitter of a coronet, flattered by the ardour which could not brook delay, and captivated by the exalted sentiment (as she fancied it), that spurned ceremony, was not likely to speculate very deeply upon the future. With the blind confidence of

her years, she took no thought, asked no counsel, breathed no prayer, but threw herself into her lover's arms, and left the rest to fate.

Fate so far repaid the trust, that no dishonourable advantage was taken of her inexperience, and her first year or two of matrimony was as happy as she herself could have anticipated. The constant variety and excitement of the wandering life they led, left her scant leisure for making discoveries prejudicial to her peace. If Etheredge sometimes taxed her strength too heavily, and showed too little concern for her fears or her accommodation, she attributed it rather to thoughtlessness, or ignorance of the female constitution, than to intentional neglect. When she became a mother, however, she could no longer accompany him in all his excursions, and began to sigh for a quieter existence. It was dull to be left for days together in a lonely village, among strange faces, while he was gone shooting in the mountains, or exploring uninhabited islets; and she had anxieties about the infant she had never felt on her own account. Before the birth of her second child, they had re-entered civilized regions; but she perceived with sorrow, that she was no longer her hus-

band's sole, nor even his chief companion. He was able to amuse himself without her; perhaps he was a little tired of his lovely wife, and preferred inferior society to that with which he had grown familiar.

Veronica was hurt and mortified; no woman, however proud of her beauty, likes to be valued solely for it, and our young lady, awakened by this time to wider views and nobler instincts, was conscious of deserving a higher place than she seemed to hold in her husband's regard. She was sensible enough to understand that he could not be always at her side, as in the first months of their union, though it had cost her a pang to acquiesce in that truth; but she hoped a different kind of affection would succeed to that exhausted ardour.

This expectation was not realised. Etheredge was not a bad fellow, and neither more depraved nor more selfish than most men of his age and rank; but he was shallow, both in heart and brain, and so totally devoid of sentiment that its manifestation by others was unintelligible to him. He did not comprehend the importance women attach to trifling marks of sympathy and consideration, and often wounded their sensibili-

ties without meaning to offend. Protest, of course, was useless against natural deficiency; nor was there much chance of imbuing the dull soul with the finer shades of feeling. Veronica's impetuous temperament flung itself in vain against that impassible rock; she might crumble away the smooth surface of good-humoured indifference it still presented to her, but mould it to her fancy, never!

This was not the only trouble Veronica had to contend with. The dowager Lady Etheredge, it has been intimated, entertained most exalted notions of her own dignity and consequence. The last scion of a noble house, of which she inherited the estates, she had had interest enough to get her father's barony revived for her husband; and having made him a peer, endowed him with ample wealth, and presented him with an heir, she ruled over him with undisputed sway for the rest of his life. She reckoned on maintaining the same authority over her son, and not during his minority only, for the property being hers, she was not called upon to abdicate on his coming of age. Her great ambition was that this son should illustrate the new dynasty she had founded, by a splendid

alliance; she took note of all the heiresses and patrician beauties each season produced, and carefully weighed their claims before recommending one for her son's adoption: it never occurred to her that he might demur to her verdict.

What, then, was her indignation when she learnt that, without so much as informing her of his intention, the young man had absolutely married "a Miss Leycester!" of good old blood, to be sure, and received in society quite as select as any Etheredge frequented, but still a private gentleman's daughter, without fortune to supply the want of rank, and not *celebrated* for any charms she might possess. In her Ladyship's eyes, a reputation for beauty was of greater value than beauty itself; there was some *éclat* in carrying off a reigning belle, whose praises were sung by fashionable poets, whose lineaments were portrayed by popular painters, and whose smiles were disputed by aristocratic rivals: but what was the pleasure of picking up a violet under a hedge?

By the time her son returned from abroad, the Dowager's wrath was somewhat cooled down; she was anxious to have him with her again,

and as it was impossible to separate him from his wife, Veronica was included in the invitation. The latter was not best pleased at the terms in which this piece of condescension was notified to her, but did not wish to place any obstacle in the way of a reconciliation; while Etheredge was glad to have his wife recognised. Veronica, he fondly believed, was sure to create a favorable impression; and he bade her spare no pains nor expense to appear before a fastidious critic in proper style.

The young matron obeyed his injunctions, but the perverse Dowager, who was prepared to patronize a half-formed, insignificant little girl, started with displeased surprise at the sight of the lovely and perfectly appointed woman her son presented to her. It was downright presumption in "Miss Leycester" to look like a peeress! No sweetness of disposition, no efforts to please, could propitiate a person determined not to be pleased. Lady Etheredge, who had still a hankering after admiration, and whose vanity was encouraged by the little Court of flatterers she kept about her, looked on with anything but satisfaction at the attraction her daughter-in-law possessed for male visitors;

while even ladies sometimes committed the mistake of preferring Veronica's society, and, ignorant perhaps that the consort of the reigning peer was not lady paramount, paid her more attention than the imperious Dowager approved.

To balance the civilities she met with abroad, Veronica had therefore to submit to systematic persecution at home, in which the toadies joined, in order to stand well with their patroness. The impropriety of her conduct in eloping with her lover was much insisted on; she would have a great deal to do, it was said, to efface the recollection of that misdemeanour. "Circumstanced as *you* are, you should be very careful how you" do this or the other, was a caution frequently addressed to her. If the poor girl indulged her naturally high spirits, she was admonished that boisterous levity did not become her position, and lamented over in the conclave, as a flirt or a hoyden; if, to avoid offence, she was silent and kept in the background, she was voted insipid and utterly unfit for the part she had to play.

These disparaging remarks, continually repeated, of course reached Lord Etheredge's ears,

and were not without effect. The heat of passion being over, he began to believe, what every one about him insinuated, that he had done a very foolish thing in marrying a girl without money or influential connexions. He had displeased his mother, upon whom he was entirely dependent; and had thrown himself away—that was the phrase constantly sounding about him—upon a young creature, the spell of whose loveliness was already broken. If these inuendoes did not set him against his wife, as they were very well calculated to do, they prevented his taking her part as decidedly as he ought; he afforded her little support against his mother's clique, and did not consider his dignity involved in the support of hers.

Even the notice bestowed upon her children was made a source of annoyance to her. The elder one, a girl, had by a stroke of policy been named after her grandmamma, who took a great fancy to her, overwhelmed her with injudicious kindness, and did her best to concentrate the child's affections upon herself. It was a severe trial to see her daughter set, as it were, over her own head, pampered and indulged in every whim, and tacitly encouraged to set her autho-

rity at defiance. Miss Elizabeth was wilful enough, and by no means easy to manage before this interference; how, after so much humouring and petting, she was ever to be kept in due subordination, her mother was at a loss to conceive. The little boy was fortunately too young at present to be injured by excessive (and not altogether well-meant) fondness.

Most thankful was Veronica when their visit at Belcliffe drew to a close; and fervently did she pray she might never enter that splendid mansion again, except as its mistress. She had never thought to undergo so many humiliations as had been imposed upon her within those stately walls, which would one day become her son's heritage, and where she might herself hope to reign supreme. Any amount of privation would have been preferable, in her estimation, to dependence upon favour so ungraciously conferred; but her husband was less sensitive, and for his sake and her children's, she refrained from complaints.

The gilding was fast wearing off her wedding ring! She had been so proud of her conquest so flattered by the vehemence of a passion that broke through all barriers to reach her, so dazzled

by the splendour of the match! Wiser heads than hers, indeed, shared the delusion, and while deprecating the precipitation with which she had rushed into wedlock, admitted her luck in securing a consort whose alliance was an object of desire to the most ambitious of chaperones. The disappointment was a double one; as to the man, for when his first ardour abated, he was discovered to be selfish, inconstant, destitute alike of intellect, sentiment, and principle; as to the position, for without that assistance which his mother was not disposed to afford, Etheredge's means were barely equal to the support of his rank; he could keep no state, make no display, and as he was the last man in the world to brook any curtailment of his personal expenses, his wife was obliged to practise the strictest economy, lest she should involve him in debt, and thereby aggravate the inconvenience his marriage with her entailed.

The withholding of the Dowager's countenance had other ill effects besides the financial one. "Society," which can be very prim on occasion, had disapproved of Veronica's elopement, and looked somewhat coldly upon the new peeress who had no carriage, and did not give grand

entertainments. Had Lady Etheredge taken her up and introduced her properly, this prejudice would soon have worn off; but left to fight her way single-handed, without even the aid of her own mother, she failed in securing the requisite amount of female patronage, and was seen too often surrounded by her husband's male acquaintances. Her beauty and lively spirits attracted plenty of admirers; Lord Etheredge, among whose faults jealousy was not to be reckoned, had no objection to his wife's amusing herself in any way that did not interfere with his enjoyment, and it was not to be expected that, at her age and in her circumstances, she should voluntarily resign the homage all women prize.

To Leycester, quick of apprehension and learned in the world's ways, his sister's position appeared fraught with peril. He knew how censorious tongues delight to fasten upon imprudence, and magnify it into crime; he knew further how often suspicion helps to verify itself, by driving to extremity those on whom its shadow has fallen; and like most men who who have been rather free in their own conduct, he was particularly anxious that no stain should rest upon the fame of his female connections.

It may at first sight appear singular that, with these fears in his breast, he should consent to entrust a younger sister to the guardianship of one who was scarcely able to guide her own steps aright. But he comprehended Veronica's desire for a companion of her own sex, and perceived that in every way it would be an advantage to her. The two might safely do together many things that would be forbidden to one alone; and the generous instinct of protection would render Veronica careful, for Azalea's sake, how she infringed limits she would not have hesitated to break through on her own account. Not content with this, he bespoke his wife's unobtrusive vigilance on Lady Etheredge's behalf.

"Show yourself with her, my love, and let her feel she has a friend in you. The intimacy will be a credit to her in the public eye, and she cannot but profit by your womanly counsel and example."

Anna readily promised her good offices. Of all Hyacinth's family, she liked Veronica best; but even had she been less disposed to undertake the task, she could not have refused a request of his, urged in so flattering a manner. At this

particular juncture, she was more than usually alive to the slightest indication of his feelings, for since that day at Richmond she was haunted by a beautiful apparition which seemed to stand between her and her husband. It was hardly to be hoped that he should be proof against such fascinations as Mrs. Agnew's, and Anna knew his fatal attractiveness too well to doubt his finding favor with any woman he seriously devoted himself to pursue.

Hyacinth was, in fact, undeniably smitten with this new divinity; he was no longer in a hurry to leave town, but caught at every opportunity of meeting Mrs. Agnew, and rendering himself agreeable to her assuming, with the facility peculiar to him, the tone, and style most calculated to win her regard. His old self was roused, desires and aims long dormant revived in his breast, and he seemed about to plunge once more into the arena of gallant intrigue.

Some such trial Anna had always anticipated; she was quite aware that an Ethiopian cannot change his skin by one effort, and was prepared to see her husband's dominant vice re-assert its empire. Yet with the happiness of all her future life at stake—and, perhaps, with a more re-

mendous hazard impending, she could do nothing to avert the threatened evil. Interference, direct or indirect, was not likely to be attended with benefit, and might do positive harm. Mrs. Leicester's was no common feeling of jealousy; nothing of pique, and little of selfishness mingled with her alarm; she feared indeed to lose the affection she valued more than any temporal blessing, but far more did she dread the consequences to him of a relapse into his former errors. If he listened now to the voice of the syren, what spell should lure him home? If he sinned against his better knowledge, would Heaven again interpose?

It was not by Hyacinth's coldness or neglect that his wife detected his nascent *penchant* for Mrs. Agnew. On the contrary, he was the more amiably demonstrative, as he felt his allegiance falter; but she, who had concentrated her faculties upon him so long that she might almost be said to live his life, perceived the fever burning in his viens. Though bland and considerate as ever, his courtesy could not blind her to his pre-occupation; he was restless, abstracted, alternately pensive and excited; while his tenderness, she suspected, was but the overflowing of an

emotion that must have vent. Yet she constrained herself to appear unconscious of the tumult within him, believing that the vehemence of passion, like that of fire, is aggravated by letting in the wind of publicity upon a flame that might otherwise be kept under control. His very perturbation was a hopeful sign; he was not yielding without an effort. She would not cut off his retreat by showing she had discovered his weakness; but committing the cause to One who could not err in His conduct of it, she awaited the event with what calmness she might.

CHAPTER IX.

"Midst many rocks we guard more against wrecks;
And thus with women: howsoe'er it shocks some's
Self-love, there's safety in a crowd of coxcombs.

But Adeline had not the least occasion
For such a shield, which leaves but little merit
To virtue proper, or good education.

Her chief resource was in her own high spirit,
Which judged mankind at their due estimation:

And for coquetry, she disdain'd to wear it:
Secure of admiration, its impression
Was faint, as of an every-day possession."

DON JUAN.

It was well for all parties that the influence which now so powerfully swayed Hyacinth's wandering fancy, emanated from a woman of no ordinary stamp. Mrs. Agnew was not one of those heartless coquettes whom vanity, or malice urges on to disturb the peace of families. She was fond of admiration—too fond, some staid critics asserted; and frankly accepted the homage her transcendant beauty brought her; but she was too much accustomed to such homage to be intoxicated by it, and was in far less danger of

falling a victim to her crowd of worshippers than if she had boasted but one or two. She had, moreover, an innate rectitude, a "padlock on her mind," which was a better protection than the most straight-laced decorum. It was the soundness of her moral health that gave such delightful freedom to her manners. She was not always weighing consequences, and analyzing sensations; apprehending attack, and anticipating defeat.

When the renowned Hyacinth Leycester joined her train, she welcomed his accession, and showed herself not insensible to the grace and piquancy of his manners; but he did not dazzle her as he had dazzled the less experienced Laura Bathurst, or awaken in her emotions similar to those he had excited in the more inflammable Constantia Fitzmaurice. It might be that he was not the style of person to produce a dangerous effect upon Mrs. Agnew's fancy; it is certain that some hitherto unknown scruples of conscience prevented his putting forth his full powers of fascination; but this does not materially diminish the credit ascribed to the lady, for in affairs of the heart (so called), the heart's weakness is by no means the most fertile source

of mischief. The barren triumph of attaching to her car a gallant famed for good taste and good fortune, the barbarous relish for power, even as shown by inflicting pain, the mere propensity to intrigue would have led many women to entangle themselves and him in a maze, whence issue unharmed was all but impossible.

By none of these petty motives was Mrs. Agnew governed. She cared little to add another name to her list of conquests; a more than nominal victory she did not court, since it must have been accomplished at the expense of his wife's misery and his mortification, if it did not prove disastrous to the victor as to the vanquished. Not only, therefore, did she use no arts to deepen the impression first made, but as soon as she perceived that he was seriously attaching himself to her, she took great care lest anything in her conduct should be construed into encouragement. She felt herself strong enough not to seek safety in flight, but he should not have to reproach her with raising hopes she had no intention to fulfil.

Now, Hyacinth was just at that critical point when a smile more or less would decide his fate. He was far too susceptible to resist the magnet

placed in contact with him; all that his good resolutions could do was to check his eagerness, and hold him back from instant obedience to the impulse of the senses. Even that small benefit, however, is not to be despised; time for reflection saves many a waverer from ruin. The struggle between judgment and inclination going on within him, prevented his prosecuting his culpable design with the tact and irresistible energy of former days; for in evil as in good, success rarely waits upon a half-hearted endeavour. Thus Mrs. Agnew escaped the glamour he was wont to throw over the sex in general, and showing no signs of weakness, did not tempt him on to improve his advantage.

How long she would have continued deaf to the voice of the charmer must remain doubtful; certain it is that her discretion at the outset, deterred Hyacinth from abandoning himself to a guilty passion; and supplied exactly what was wanting to turn the balance in favour of virtue. An indifferent reception, an ostentatious display of prudery, a marked avoidance, would each have stimulated pursuit, as surely as tokens of yielding would have invited assault. Mrs. Agnew chose a more judicious course. She neither fled

at his approach, nor provoked a contest, but met him with a frank cordiality which half disarmed the foe. Without seeming to see more in his attentions than the simple liking they might lawfully express, she contrived to keep before his eyes the remembrance of their several positions, had always a word of delicate commendation for Mrs. Leycester (whom she thoroughly appreciated, as in some sort a kindred spirit), and introduced frequent allusions to her own absent husband, fighting his country's battles in the Crimea, whence his return might now be looked for shortly.

"Happy man!" exclaimed Hyacinth one day, with a great sigh, and a glance which gave point to an otherwise common-place phrase. "I hope he sets a proper value upon the treasure he possesses."

"Few gentlemen, I fear, form a due estimate of their own luck in marriage," replied Mrs. Agnew, rather significantly; "let them be blest with as rare a combination of beauty, sense, and sweetness, as ever fell to the lot of one mortal, yet they are sure to hanker after some supposed goddess, whom they would have passed over had they still been free to choose, and whose

envied proprietor is probably as little contented as themselves."

Stealing a look at Hyacinth, she divined the reply that was trembling on his lip, and with sudden resolution anticipated an explanation that could not much longer be avoided.

"There is yourself, for instance, Mr. Leycester. Never perhaps was a man more happily mated than you; we bystanders can discern but one drawback from your entire felicity; are *you* satisfied?"

Hyacinth was startled by this home thrust: abashed by the gentle gravity of the gaze bent on him, he did not venture to confess the yearnings which at that moment agitated his breast, but confined himself to a general remark on the perversity of fate. Regrets, he said, would creep in; without disparaging the consort he had selected, a man might sometimes be permitted to wish that destiny had given another to his arms.

"A man who permits himself that wish, trifles with a great danger," answered Mrs. Agnew. "Nor, apart from any moral consideration, does he show wisdom in so repining. Some blemish must of necessity be found in the fairest of

women; some defect of intellect or temper, some disadvantage of position, which familiarity would not long fail to discover; thus, were the change practicable, it would lead but to fresh disappointment; and as the bond cannot be lightly broken, it is surely unreasonable to harbour vain desires after joys beyond our reach."

Hyacinth insinuated that fruit of the kind so coveted, often hung within our reach, though prejudice forbade us to pluck it.

"Satan's argument precisely!" returned Mrs. Agnew. "Eve had only to stretch out her hand and eat; yet it was something more than prejudice that rendered the gratification fatal. Has it ever struck you, Mr. Leycester, that the boldest writers of professed fiction, bound, therefore, by no rule but possibility, have never, in one single instance (that I am aware of), dared to represent unhallowed love as productive of anything but disappointment and misery? Great talent has been employed in painting its transports, softening its coarser features, and extenuating its guilt; we are often compelled to sympathize with the offenders, to admit that human nature could hardly resist the temptation; but the end of such narratives is invariably the same.

It would almost seem as if a power beyond himself guided the writer's pen, and forced him, like the unwilling prophet of old, to bear witness to the truth. The inculcation of strict morality is certainly not the aim of most romances turning on this point, of French ones more especially; yet, with an unlimited choice of incidents, characters, and periods, with full liberty to arrange events according to his own fancy, the least scrupulous of authors never ventures to represent his erring lovers as attaining more than transitory bliss. The sequence of the narrative seems as uniform as the order of nature; first rapture, then satiety, disgust, recrimination, remorse, despair. If the intrigue be secret, there is a constant feeling of insecurity; if attended with open scandal, it involves in greater or less degree, loss of position, of fortune, of honor, of life—to go no further. I am now speaking only of the man's share in the consequences; his blasted prospects, lengthened expatriation, liability to an avenging bullet, exclusion from the calm pleasures of the domestic circle. The woman's portion has been often told; the hidden gnawings of remorse, the sickening dread of detection, the utter dependence upon the discretion of a paramour, or the for-

bearance of a confidante; the shame of exposure, the ruin, the universal desertion, the severance of every tie, the deprivation of every hope, the final descent, in too many cases, to the lowest depths of infamy; these constitute a fate so terrible, that no man, with a spark of generosity, would risk entailing it upon the woman he professes to love. Grant that it costs him something to restrain his inclination—and I do not underrate the struggle; grant that he suffers for a while from the fierce pangs of unsatisfied desire; the fit will pass off, leaving him stronger for the victory over self; and a day will come when he may rejoice to think he has one sin less upon his soul.”

There was nothing in all this that Hyacinth did not perfectly know already, except, perhaps, that he had never before seen the selfishness of his favorite indulgence in so strong a light; but the accents of that sweet voice penetrated his inmost heart, stirring all that was noble and excellent in it. He sat with his eyes fixed upon the ground, twining a spray of jasmine round his fingers, while she leant back in her chair, watching with some anxiety the effect of her words. Would he frankly respond to her indi-

rect appeal, or treat it with levity? affect ignorance of her meaning, or retaliate by a sarcastic assurance that the lesson was unnecessary? yield to the covert remonstrance, or be emboldened to continue openly the discussion she had broached? Before the doubt was solved, Miss Dunne entered the room.

"What is the matter with you two?" cried she. "You look as solemn as if you were at Church."

"I have taken advantage of its being Sunday afternoon to preach Mr. Leycester a sermon," replied Mrs. Agnew, assuming a playful tone, "and he receives it, I really believe, in the orthodox manner, by going to sleep."

"On the contrary, I listened attentively," said Hyacinth, starting from his reverie, "and hope to profit by the discourse. Your sister's eloquence, Miss Dunne, has a power not often met with in the pulpit."

He avoided meeting Mrs. Agnew's gaze, so that she could not tell whether he spoke in earnest.

"I think you mentioned that you were leaving town shortly?" she said, after a few indifferent remarks.

"Yes, in a day or two," answered Hyacinth at random, for he comprehended at once the drift of the question.

"We may not, then, meet again for some time," pursued the lady, heedless of the mute expostulation in his glance. "I trust, however, we shall renew our acquaintance at no very distant date. I, at least, should be sorry to say farewell for ever."

"You banish me?" murmured Leycester, as Miss Dunne, hearing a carriage stop, rushed into the front room to see at whose door.

"I prescribe change of scene," answered Mrs. Agnew, in the same low tone. "When the cure is complete, come back and thank the physician."

She gave him her hand. He pressed it to his lips; then, by a sudden motion of his arm, drew her towards him, imprinted a kiss upon her velvet cheek, and was gone before she could utter a syllable.

Miss Dunne remarked some perturbation in her sister's countenance when she turned away from the window.

"How flushed you look, Minnie," said she. "I hope you have not been quarrelling with Mr.

Leycester. You gave him a very broad hint not to continue his visits; as he no doubt thought, from his rushing off in such a hurry."

"Are you falling in love with him too, Nora?" asked the elder sister, half in jest, half in secret alarm. "I should not have fancied him at all in your line."

"Not exactly," replied Nora, "but I like to ride with him in the Park; he looks thoroughbred, and has the prettiest seat on a horse that ever I saw. I wish some one else we know resembled him."

"Here comes Mr. Sinclair, I vow," cried Mrs. Agnew, following the direction of her sister's eyes. "You may as well be civil to him, Nora."

The girl made a grimace, implying that with all her talk of ambitious views, she was not quite insensible to the personal qualifications of her suitors. Sinclair was rich enough to gratify her utmost aspirations, and keep her the finest horses in London, but what sort of figure would he present on the top of one of them?

It was late in the evening when Hyacinth reached home. He said he had dined, but from his calling for a biscuit with his coffee, Mrs.

Leycester inferred that he had not made a very substantial meal. He was pale and silent; not sullen, for he answered pleasantly enough when addressed, but with a manifest effort, as if his thoughts had to be fetched from a great distance. Something was the matter, that was clear; but true to her policy of non-intervention, she made no attempt to penetrate the mystery. To her surprise, Hyacinth suddenly roused himself from his abstraction, and enquired how soon they could leave town. It would not take long to make the necessary arrangements, she replied; the housekeeper at Hildhurst had had orders to get the place in readiness; by Tuesday every thing could be prepared for their reception."

"Let us go on Tuesday then, if you have no objection," said Hyacinth. "I am worn out with the turmoil of this dissipated city, and would fain be quiet and virtuous again."

"You forget my doctrine, that virtue lies not in the absence of temptation, but in resistance to it," observed Anna smiling.

"Aye, but where there is not strength to resist, is it not a minor virtue to avoid?" asked he.

A gleam of hope shone upon Mrs. Leycester

at these words. She moved closer to him, and remarked upon his weary looks: Hyacinth was in the mood to be caressed; his excited feelings required to be soothed by affection, his uncertain purposes to be steadied by the example of tried and unchanging love. Much good seed was ripening within him, which a little coldness would have nipped in the husk; a rough or heedless disturbance of the soil, nay, even an over-careful interference might equally have injured its growth, a storm would have blighted it for ever. Had Anna at this crisis stood resentfully aloof from her volatile husband, or betrayed a suspicion of his fidelity, she would have placed an almost insurmountable barrier in the way of his return to the right path.

As it was, conscience made him half distrustful of her sentiments towards him. Oppressed by the weight of his own emotions, he longed to claim his wonted solace, and rest his aching brow upon her bosom, but felt as if he had forfeited the privilege. She perceived the hesitation, and without seeking what cause might exist for it, or how far he merited her tenderness, she just opened her arms and took him in, with all his faults upon his head. No confidence was offered

or claimed; it was not a case where benefit could arise from dropping the veil of reserve, and making what is called "a clean breast of it." Mistakes may be explained away; wrongs confessed and atoned for; but some errors are best left in obscurity, and condoned in silence.

"Happy man!" Hyacinth had cried in passing envy of another. Was not he happy, whom two admirable women combined to preserve from the snare, one bravely arresting his downward footsteps, the other throwing wide open the door of refuge, and shrouding all offences against herself in merciful oblivion.

Perhaps it occurred to him that evening that Fortune had not, after all, been unkind in uniting his destiny with one, who, if not a paragon of beauty, added to a fair share of personal gifts the essential merit of inexhaustible indulgence for his weakness; and with less power to attract than some younger competitors, possessed the rarer skill to reclaim. Who else would have borne so much, and never hinted a reproach? He thought over all she had done for him, and blushed to remember how ill he had fulfilled his vows of undying gratitude. True he had not wronged her in act; but the merit even of that

abstinence was hardly due to him, and he was too well instructed now to believe that sin consisted only in the complete accomplishment of a bad design.

Nothing, however, that he had learnt on this subject impressed him so forcibly with the heinousness of the guilt he had contemplated, as the idea which now flashed across him, of what his own feelings would be if any unprincipled intriguer were to seduce from him the affections of the wife on whose bosom he reposed. He started as though an adder had stung him at the bare suggestion: it would be intolerable, maddening; earth would not be rich enough to afford him compensation, nor hell be too deep for his revenge! Yet these agonies he had been ready to inflict upon another, without so much as a thought of the injury he was doing him! It was frightful to reflect that he, Hyacinth Leicester, without a spark of malice in his composition, esteeming himself kindly-natured and considerate, had been ready to bring desolation and dishonour upon an unoffending individual, for no graver purpose than the gratification of a wanton fancy!

In certain cases, no rhetoric is so convincing as the *argumentum ad hominem*. Hyacinth had

been able to evade the authority of a direct command from Heaven, when it clashed with his darling pursuit; but his eyes were opening to the expediency of decrees, by which alone any kind of public or private security is maintained. Supposing every one allowed himself the licence Hyacinth had hitherto taken, whose hearth would be safe? He could not seriously entertain the belief that, because some personal graces had been liberally bestowed upon him, he was privileged to disregard a prohibition enforced, with ample reason, upon the rest of his sex. A vague idea of this sort he probably had cherished, for human nature is ingenious in self-justification; but it would not bear the light of day. Nor could he with more confidence plead that any circumstance connected with his marriage entitled him to indulgence on this score; for was not that marriage his own act? and could he in justice be at the same time tenacious of the rights conferred, and neglectful of the obligations imposed upon him? Could he, if injured by another's crime, appeal to a law he had himself deliberately transgressed?

The array of evidence against him was convincing enough; yet even now the case was not complete.

CHAPTER X.

"Boy, thou hast look'd thyself into my grace,
And art mine own."

CYMBELINE.

"He, on the other hand, if not in love,
Fell into that no less imperious passion,
Self-love,—which, when some sort of thing above
Ourselves, a singer, dancer, much in fashion,
Or duchess, princess, empress "deigns to prove"
('Tis Pope's phrase) a great longing, though a rash one,
For one especial person out of many,
Makes us believe ourselves as good as any."

DON JUAN.

Mrs. LEYCESTER was unfeignedly glad to find herself at Hildhurst again. The delight of her foster-child at the sight of her was a compensation for the anxiety she endured on his account. Compared, however, with the uneasiness Hyacinth had lately caused her, these fears lest he should meet and recognise his offspring became of minor importance. On his part, he seemed disposed to try the efficacy of the regimen he

had prescribed for himself, namely, rural quiet and seclusion, to its fullest extent. He objected to have visitors invited, and though not usually fond of his own company, spent much time alone, pursuing no doubt the meditations begun during that solitary ramble which followed his last interview with Mrs. Agnew.

Anna hardly knew whether to foster or discourage this new taste for solitude; was he reviewing his past life, or merely pining after forbidden sweets? His manner to her seemed to negative the latter assumption; if the former were true, it would be a pity to interrupt so salutary a process. She profited by the opportunities thus afforded of frequently visiting her little *protégé*, whose bestowal elsewhere, for the combined purpose of concealment and education, began again to occupy her serious attention.

The extreme heat of the weather furnished a reason for enjoining the nurse not to let him run about too much, or stray too far from home; Anna did not like to awaken the woman's suspicions by stating explicitly that she wished him kept out of Mr. Leycester's sight. Nor could she desire that Hyacinth should be refused shelter, if he took refuge in the cottage from a

heavy thunder shower, as actually occurred one day. With his wonted facility, he soon established himself in the child's good graces, and procured for him the favourable notice of Ben Mio, who was in general a grave dog, disinclined on principle to juvenile company.

"And what is your name, my little friend?" is a question that suggests itself to most people desirous of opening a conversation with strange children.

"Jasmine," was the prompt reply.

"What else?"

The boy's attention being diverted by his four footed playfellow, the nurse took upon her to answer.

"He was christened Jasmine Leycester, sir, after the good lady up at the Lodge, who stood godmother to him; but what his parents' name is we don't rightly know, nor whether he has any, poor lamb!"

The interest exhibited by the listener drew forth the whole story, as known in the village, viz., how the infant was deserted by its foreign nurse or mother, and how Mrs. Leycester had undertaken the charge of it.

"Just like Anna," was Hyacinth's only com-

ment at the time; "she has the kindest heart that ever beat in a human breast."

On rejoining her at dinner he said: "I discovered another of your good deeds to-day, *mon cœur*. What a pretty child that is at the old gate-house!"

Anna had often tried to prepare herself for this announcement, yet could not put an unconcerned face upon it when actually made. Her reply was not very intelligible.

"But why 'do good by stealth?'" pursued her husband. "I have never heard a word of your *protégé*, though the nurse tells me he once lived here with you."

"He did for a short time," said Anna, making a great effort to speak indifferently. "I was alone, and glad of the distraction. When I had you by me again, he sank, of course, into the second place; sank, indeed, so far out of my thoughts, that I suppose I forgot altogether to mention a history connected with a period it always pains me to recall."

This explanation passed for the moment; but Hyacinth had noticed her confusion when he related his adventure, and was struck on subsequent occasions with her reluctance to enlarge

upon a topic naturally most interesting to her; she who was so frank and straightforward in other matters, so little addicted to petty mysteries or underhand proceedings! He had stumbled upon a secret, it appeared; why should it be a secret? Why should concealment be desirable in this case more than in fifty other works of charity freely imparted to him? It was a strange story altogether, not very clear in its details; she could hardly have forgotten an incident so unprecedented in village annals, especially as the child continued to reside within easy reach, and received almost daily visits from her. Did she know more about its parentage than she chose to reveal? Yet what possible motive could she have for withholding such knowledge from him! They had been separated just a year; could it be that But not even to his own ear would Hyacinth breathe the dark suspicion that rose before his mind's eye. He would not entertain the idea for an instant, and even accused himself of depravity for conceiving one so monstrous. It seemed more reasonable to suppose that Anna, having sought to console herself in his absence by the nurture of this friendless babe, had afterwards

over-rated his susceptibility, or under-rated his humane feelings; and fearing he might not like to imagine that his place had been filled up, or might disapprove her assumption of such a charge, had refrained from going into the matter until the long silence made it awkward to speak.

In spite of his efforts, however, he was not quite contented with this solution; it did not coincide entirely either with Anna's character, or with the probabilities of the case. Mere benevolence might have saved the boy from the workhouse, without rendering it necessary to bring him up in the style Hyacinth had witnessed. Now he thought of it, there was something in the child's features not wholly unfamiliar to him; he must scrutinize them more closely, and try to remember of whom they reminded him. Opportunity was not wanting. When the first shock was over, Mrs. Leycester derived immense relief from the reflection that the encounter she had so long dreaded had taken place without any momentous result. Finding that her husband neither recognised the child, nor exhibited displeasure at her adoption of him, she gradually relaxed the restraints she had imposed

on herself, and no longer opposed Jasmine's desire to be on visiting terms at the Lodge.

"May I come and see you, Mamma Leycester?" was a request very frequently urged on all manner of grounds, and hitherto steadily evaded on all manner of pretences, till Hyacinth's own lips removed the barrier.

"Bring him up to the house some day, Mrs. Carpenter," said he to the nurse; "there are no end of pretty things for him to see."

This was how his doubts were ultimately elucidated. A man, we know, however fond of beholding his own face in the glass, may go his way, and straightway forget what manner of man he is; and Hyacinth might possibly have gazed for years upon his living image, without suspecting whose lineaments were thus presented to him. He was satisfied they were not Anna's, nor could he fix upon any known individual with whom to connect his vague reminiscence. But it happened one day that, as he was lifting the child to look at some ornament on the chimney-piece, he caught a sight of their two heads in the mirror, and was struck by an instant conviction of the truth. This could be no freak of nature. No woman, surely, whose whole soul

was not full of him, could have borne a child in whose countenance every line of his own was faithfully retraced. He set the boy down hastily, for his heart seemed to stand still.

"Ah, Cinthy!" cried his wife from the other end of the room, "you ought not to lift that great fellow; I am sure he is too heavy for you. Have you strained yourself, dearest?" she added anxiously, observing his sudden pallor.

"No, no, but he makes one's arms ache," said Hyacinth, catching at the pretext. He gave the toy into Jasmine's hands, who forthwith carried it across to "Mamma Leycester;" while the young man took advantage of their pre-occupation to slip out of the room.

His mind was in a state of tumult that rendered solitude absolutely indispensable. Up to this moment, he had not known himself to be a father; and the strange sensation the discovery woke within him was enhanced by the singularity of its attendant circumstances, as well as by the mystery which still remained to be unravelled. Of the fact he did not doubt for an instant; it was borne in upon him with a force which no amount of legal evidence could surpass, or even equal. His concern was rather to enquire of

memory on whom he (too rightly named Sultan) had conferred the title of mother.

By degrees, his scattered souvenirs grouped themselves round one centre; and from the cloudy haze of the past, a beautiful figure stood forth. Clad in light drapery, which scarcely concealed the outline of the fairest of forms, it swayed to and fro to the sound of music, with a soft and even motion like that of a bird upon the wing, or poised itself in attitudes such as a sculptor might behold in his dreams, but could never hope to embody in marble. Now it seemed a sea-nymph, decked with pearls and coral, gliding along with a step as smooth and undulating as her native element; now, a bacchante, wreathed with vine-leaves, bounding with superhuman energy through the mazes of a frantic revel; then, a coquettish gitana, glittering in gorgeous colours, alternately alluring and repelling her suitors, and baffling the quickest eye by the rapid movements of her "many twinkling" feet. Other sylphs, of no mean attractiveness, floated or tripped around her, but their limbs looked clumsy, their poses stiff and angular, beside her surpassing grace and loveliness. At every fresh achievement, a

murmur of applauding voices mingled with the strains of the orchestra, and costly exotics—meet tribute to one so bright and so fragile—fell in showers around *la déesse de la danse*.

Such a vision, clothed in real flesh and blood, had created an unprecedented sensation among opera-goers, in the year before Hyacinth's marriage. The heads of all the young men about town were turned by this new star of the ballet, whom they were not content to gaze at from their stalls, and who was reported to lose none of her claims to admiration on nearer inspection. Mr. Dacre, as an *habitué* of the green-room, was one of the first to make her acquaintance, and by him Leycester was introduced.

She treated him from the first with marked distinction. His very bow prepossessed her in his favor; for he was as deferential to the *danseuse* as he was *nonchalant* with great ladies, and approached her with a certain diffidence which gratified her more than the open adulation of less adroit courtiers. Perhaps, too, his fair and half-effeminate northern beauty had a peculiar charm for the young Italian, accustomed to jetty locks and swarthy complexions; and she

naturally took delight in the society of one who could talk to her in her own liquid language. Hyacinth's conquest was rapid and complete; without solicitation, almost without design on his part, he became the object of Rita's intense devotion. No competitor, however illustrious, could obtain a hearing; no offers, however splendid, could tempt her to transfer to another the smiles she bestowed upon him. There was no calculation, no reserve in her love: "*io l'amo*," was her simple answer to all objections and representations.

Leycester's sentiments were more complex; he was enamoured, it is true; platonic friendship with a woman of Rita's stamp, is not to be looked for at twenty-two; but vanity entered largely into the feelings with which he regarded her. While duly alive to her perfections, he was also highly flattered by a success which (not being of a nature to be concealed) made him the envy of half London. There was pride, as well as pleasure, in the thought that the charms which nightly attracted hundreds of rapturous beholders, belonged wholly to him, that it was his eye the popular favorite sought in the crowded theatre, his applause she most coveted; and that

for him it was reserved to realize in private the mimic transports she feigned so well.

The importance his connexion with her gave him in the estimation of the sex in general surprised himself, acquainted as he was with the weak side of female nature. Notoriety, he perceived, was a more powerful magnet than any personal qualifications. Even ladies of strict manners, who would have scorned to betray the slightest acquaintance with stage-gossip, were secretly curious to scrutinize the merits of a man, for whose sake, it was whispered, the renowned ballerina had slighted a duke, turned a deaf ear to an ambassador, and refused at least two princely establishments.

Hyacinth had, indeed, scrupled to take advantage of Rita's generous infatuation. He set plainly before her his narrow means, his total inability to support even a modest *ménage*, his unwillingness to stand in the way of her fortunes, and mar the brilliant destiny to which she might reasonably aspire. But none of these considerations moved her. Need he ruin himself, she asked, because she loved him? Her talent provided her with ample funds; she had handsome apartments, a carriage, a sufficient

retinue; what could she want more but "*il fulgor del suo bel viso?*" and why should a question of money come between them? Leicester did not press the objection farther; and had every reason to be satisfied with a mistress who never gave him the remotest cause for jealousy, and involved him in no extravagance. She would not allow him to make her any but the most trifling presents, and when he once brought her a bracelet (costing about a fifth of his annual income) she positively declined to keep it, and scolded him vehemently, with an embrace between each period, for supposing it necessary to bribe her with trinkets. A photograph of his beloved face, in a locket about the size of a shilling, was the most valuable *cadeau* she could be induced to accept at his hands.

Besides the pride of victory, the joy of possession, and the regard generated by her unbounded affection for himself, Hyacinth found inexhaustible amusement in Rita's society. Young, impulsive, and as little sophisticated as might be, either by education or experience of the world, she was a specimen of womanhood such as he had not yet encountered. She was just informed enough to avoid shocking his

fastidious taste by errors of speech, or gross violations of decorum, though in a foreigner such defects would have been less apparent to him than in a fellow-countrywoman; but most of her ways and ideas were as thoroughly unconventional as if she had belonged to another sphere. She dropped into her chosen lover's arms with the undoubting simplicity of a child, without hesitation as to her right so to bestow herself, without a care for the future. The common arts of coquetry were quite unknown to her, as was that doctrine of "reserve" which man's ingratitude teaches; she loved with all her heart, and had yet to learn why she should conceal or restrain the emotion.

What space Hyacinth left in her heart, was engrossed by her profession, for she danced *con amore*; and the two occupations were sometimes curiously intertwined. She applied to her lover's benefit all the airs and graces it was her business to practise, hung round him, bent over him, sank beside him, in the most approved stage fashion; and if a new idea occurred to her in the midst of the most sentimental discourse, she would spring from him to execute the manœuvre, or try the effect of the pose. Leicester was

captivated by a bizarrerie so near akin to his own, and so far from resenting this divided attention, he followed his houri's lead, and had the merit of suggesting one or two evolutions which gained the applause of the Town. His friends advised him to apply for the post of ballet-master; and he professed at times some notion of recruiting his scanty finances by appearing before the curtain, if he could get a handsome offer. He was sure he could do the attitudinizing, and play a first-rate Cupid to Rita's Pysche; it was only the pirouettes, he declared, that (literally) floored him. Rita took up the scheme seriously, and was at great pains to instruct him in the mysteries of the art; but it is needless to say the public were not indulged by a sight of his proficiency.

Things went on thus till the close of the season, when the beautiful Italian left England to fulfil other engagements. Leycester, as we know, spent the winter at Cheltenham, and remarking Mrs. Delamere's decided partiality, thought the opportunity of consolidating his prospects, too good to be neglected. If the match were not, in some respects, so brilliant as he might compass, it was free, on the other hand, from many dis-

advantages to which purely mercenary alliances are liable. The lady was her own mistress, encumbered neither with guardians nor expectant relatives; her fortune was manageable both in kind and amount, she had no positive defects of manner or appearance, and he really liked her as well as any woman he knew, possessed of the indispensable qualification. He was full young to marry, no doubt, and could well afford to wait a few years before he surrendered his bachelor freedom; but he was weary of the attempt to reconcile his luxurious tastes with his slender resources, and as the only alternative was to indulge them at some other person's expense, he deemed it, on the whole, less objectionable to throw the burden on a rich wife, than on struggling tradespeople.

As a matter, therefore, of pure convenience, he offered his hand, and went through the form appointed to legalize the transaction, without a thought of the solemn obligations he thereby contracted, or any compunction at pronouncing an oath he never even proposed to himself to observe. Was it not done every day? and by men who would have avenged in the sternest fashion any slur upon their veracity? He

thought the whole ceremony as meaningless as one or two of its antiquated phrases; and attached no more importance to the words in which he vowed to forsake all other, and keep himself only to his wife, than to those by which he endowed her *with all his worldly goods*.

His conduct as a husband was in many respects better than his principles. He treated his wife always with courtesy, sometimes with affection; and neither abused the power the law gave him over her property, nor outraged her feelings by open infidelity. Beyond this, he esteemed himself free to follow his own devices.

With the spring came Rita Frascani, returning with undiminished grace and elasticity to the scene of her triumphs. Her old admirers crowded round her to renew their homage, and among them Hyacinth Leycester. His former rivals anticipated a cool reception for him, and predicted that his reign was over. Perhaps he thought so too, though he would not be absent on such an occasion. But Rita had seen nothing like him during her recent wanderings: she had danced in three continental capitals, and had been wooed in each by princes, field-m Marshals, and magnates of every degree; the finest types

of several distinct races had passed in review before her, yet no face haunted her memory like that young English gentleman's, no accents fell like his, with sympathetic cadence, upon her ear. More regular features, a more majestic frame, she had often met with: a cavalier who united in his own person so many attributes of fascination, so refined in all his habits, so soft, yet so manly, so ardent, yet so gentle, the very incarnation, in short, of her dreams of Love, had never since presented himself before her. She returned, then, more enamoured than ever, the preference of instinct confirmed and strengthened by comparisons which all redounded to Leycester's advantage.

The news of his marriage during the interval smote her at first with a cruel pang; but she was greatly consoled by his assurance that love had nothing whatever to do with the arrangement, and that though he had given his name to an estimable lady of his own class, through whose means he was enabled to take up his proper position in the world, his heart had not wandered for an instant from his adored Rita. There was nothing in this very startling to the lax morality of Southern Europe: Rita was ac-

customed to consider the matrimonial tie no bar to the maintenance of a supplementary *amour*, and her education had not furnished her with any motive for observing a stricter rule than that adopted by the leaders of society in her own country. If Hyacinth's standard was purer, his practice and that of his equals was unfortunately scarcely more correct; and he had as little hesitation in renewing his intimacy with her, as she in abandoning herself to the delights of his conversation and company.

It was not surprising that a *liaison* of this nature should lead to some palpable result. The fair Sylphide, however, was woefully disconcerted when she found herself likely to be debarred for some time from the exercise of her art, and burdened in perpetuity with the care of another life. Hyacinth did his best to comfort her, under what would, he hoped, prove only a temporary inconvenience; and to relieve her of one source of disquiet, promised to take the entire charge of the offspring that might be born to them. He was rich enough now to pay for his follies, and would engage to provide for the child, and have it carefully brought up under his own eye.

Cheered by this assurance, Rita left England at the end of July, and from that period all communication between her and Hyacinth ceased. He had furnished her with the address of a person in his confidence, through whom she might convey news of her welfare and her wishes, but none reached him. The lively interest with which he had at first looked forward to the expected announcement, abated considerably as time went on, till at last other objects engrossed his attention, and Rita was well-nigh forgotten. Before April of the following year, he was a fugitive from home, a houseless wanderer upon the face of the earth; and in the raging of the domestic storm, the hurry of departure, he never once thought of leaving behind directions what was to be done in case she claimed his proffered assistance.

When reviewing his past career, indeed, at a cooler moment, Rita's image rose up among the throng of accusing shades; but either he did not recollect that he was bound to her by any special tie, or if the thought crossed him at all, he concluded that some casualty had averted the threatened embarrassment, and that the Italian, who was not given to writing, had not deemed

it worth while to trouble him further about it. With some such careless assumption, the subject was dismissed; and as this particular incident of his life was not one of those that caused him the deepest remorse, it might have slumbered for years to come in the depths of his memory, had not the extraordinary resemblance of Anna's *protegé* to himself driven him to search among his souvenirs for a clue to the mystery.

It did not follow that he had hit upon the right; nor was it easy to imagine by what concurrence of accidents Rita Frascani's child should have been abandoned at Hildhurst; but Hyacinth could descry no other outlet for his perplexity, and resolved to follow up this faint track as diligently as was consistent with the preservation of his secret.

CHAPTER XI.

" Ah! troppo tardi t'ho conosciuta,
Sublime donna !
Col mio rimorso è amor rinato."

NORMA.

WE may as well put the reader at once in possession of the facts which it took Mr. Leycester weeks to collect. The child was his, and by the beautiful danseuse whom he had inspired with so absorbing a passion. She was engaged at Rio Janiero the summer after its birth; and finding it awkward to carry an infant with her, she sent it to England with its nurse, who was charged to leave a letter of explanation with Hyacinth's confidant, and abide by his instructions. Before this commission could be executed, Hyacinth had gone off, no one knew whither; his agent could only advise the nurse to take country lodgings, for the sake of the babe's health, and await the result of the enquiry he would immediately set on foot after his principal. The great house at

Hildhurst being at that time unoccupied—for Mrs. Leycester, it will be remembered, had gone abroad—he saw no objection to the foreigner's temporary residence in that village, especially as she was profoundly ignorant of her nursling's paternal connexions.

At Hildhurst, accordingly, she remained for some months, when getting acquainted with a compatriot in the neighbourhood, she was persuaded by him to decamp with the money entrusted to her for her own and the child's support. She was the more impelled to adopt this course by a consideration which should have been an additional motive for refraining from it. The gentleman to whom she was desired to look for directions, wrote her that he had been unsuccessful in his endeavours to discover the present abode of the friend to whom the letter brought by her was addressed; and that he could devise nothing better than that she should rejoin Mademoiselle Frascani, whom he had more fully informed in writing of his reasons for suggesting this step. All needful details were added of the route to be taken, and ample means supplied for defraying the expenses of the journey. The prospect of the voyage was as disagreeable as the addition

to her funds was tempting. She had not engaged, she told her lover, to run all over the world with a bambino whom nobody cared to own. A little judicious pressing overcame her expiring honesty, and one fine day she went off with him, leaving not a trace behind.

Her correspondent, hearing no more of her, concluded that his recommendation had been complied with, and congratulated himself on having disposed so quietly of a troublesome business. The woman, having carefully destroyed both his epistle to her, and that which he enclosed for her mistress, nothing afforded the villagers a hint as to the child's natural protectors; while the mother never learnt the miscarriage of her scheme.

With a humanity common among the poor, the Simpsons accepted the guardianship of the stranger God had brought to their door. Before the burden became too heavy for them to bear, Mrs. Leycester stepped in to the rescue; the child's countenance guiding her one step nearer to the solution of the mystery surrounding it.

Hyacinth, of course, had the benefit of previous knowledge to assist him in his researches; and could put together, in something like shape,

such fragments of the foregoing narrative as were to be learnt by enquiry or induction. The final confirmation was obtained by application to the person he remembered to have appointed as the medium of communication between la Frascani and himself. After some delay in finding this person, Rita's original letter was produced, in which she reminded him of his promise and commended their offspring to his care. Sufficient evidence was forthcoming to establish the fact that the child now living at Hildhurst was the same Mr. Martin had sent down there; and thus the whole story was made clear. Leicester thanked Mr. Martin for the judgment he had displayed in the conduct of the affair, reimbursed him for the expenses he had incurred, and begged him to preserve the silence he had hitherto discreetly maintained.

When all the external circumstances had been thoroughly investigated, came the time for grave meditation upon the tale so disclosed. A remark of Mrs. Agnew's had already led him to ponder much upon the amount of misery caused by these sins of self-indulgence, on which society commonly passes so lenient a sentence; he had never recognised the full deformity of his own special

vice till she showed him the odious brand of selfishness marked ineffaceably on its front. Yes, so little root does the seed of life take in some soils not wholly barren, that this nominal soldier of the Cross, who would have recoiled from consciously worshipping a self-invented deity, or bowing down to a material idol, who shrank from the utterance of profane language, and was not wanting in filial reverence, who could control his angry tempers, and abstain with scrupulous care from injuring another in fortune or reputation, had yet continued to live in open and repeated violation of a command as emphatic as any by which those offences are forbidden, and had only of late begun to think himself seriously to blame!

Here may be seen the bitter fruit of calling evil good, and good evil. Man, it is true, should obey a divine injunction, without stopping to weigh its importance, and narrowly balance the arguments for and against it; but while the mass of mankind is governed less by abstract principles than by considerations appealing to their interest or their understanding, so long will he confer a benefit who unmasks a fresh delusion, and forces us to call bad deeds by their right

names. Remove the smooth skin, the soft flesh, the elastic muscle, the delicate nerve from the favorite goddess Voluptuousness, and there is left the ghastly skeleton Sensuality, grinning as in hideous mockery at its wretched victims, its blind and degraded devotees.

So the apologetic phrases in common use—amiable weakness, warm blood of youth, natural susceptibility,—had too long encouraged Hyacinth to persevere in a course, the inherent baseness of which was daily revealing itself to him in darker colours. What was really the part he had acted in the human drama? Divested of all false coloring, it looked very like that of a fiend, scattering wrath, heart-burning, jealousy, shame, despair, for his own amusement, or for a petty triumph. Was it a light thing, a venial offence, a matter for mild censure, to augment the mass of evil afflicting humanity, and spread the fatal contagion on every side?

The circle of mischief widened as he gazed upon it: besides the ruinous consequences to the principal sinners, and the injury done to those immediately connected with them, there must be taken into account the frequent corruption of the subordinate personages concerned in such

transactions, the bad example set to society at large: who shall say, indeed, where the eddy terminates?

A new specimen of the evils he had contributed to create was now set before him. This poor child, born with a stain upon its innocent brow, and doomed to know at best but an imperfect home, from which one parent or the other must inevitably be absent, might, but for a singular chain of accidents, have grown up an outcast, eating the bread of charity, or painfully earning a scanty subsistence, without a friend to aid his efforts. How many such waifs are annually thrown upon the rushing waters of existence! He meanwhile would have lived on, in ease and splendour, heedless of the struggles, the sorrows, perchance the crimes of a being for whose body and soul he was responsible to the Maker of both. He might even have died, amidst approving friends, with a tolerably placid conscience, and found himself arraigned at that awful bar for the double ruin of a son begotten in iniquity, to be plunged in want, and exposed to every form of temptation. Awful was the reflection that a man might be pursued beyond the grave by foes of his own creating, that the sins of his youth,

though forgotten by him, might cry out against him when the day of penitence was over, the power of atonement gone!

Hyacinth felt it a merciful dispensation that allowed him an opportunity of retrieving at least one false step; and yet when, from the past, he turned to the future, the path appeared encumbered with many difficulties. The task properly devolving on him had been assumed by another; how was he to remove it from her hands? Must he avow the relationship, as a sacrifice due to integrity and candour, or conceal it out of regard to a wife's feelings? Was Mrs. Leycester already aware of the fact? Her reserve on the subject might imply, at any rate, a suspicion. On the other hand it appeared unlikely, almost inconsistent with feminine nature, that she should voluntarily keep before her eyes a memento of her husband's delinquency, and never betray, by look or word, her acquaintance with his secrets. The present arrangement was so satisfactory that it seemed a pity to disturb it; he had only to second her plans for the child's welfare and its fortune was assured. She had overlooked so much that was amiss, that supposing her ignorant of this last aggravation,

Hyacinth really shrank from confessing the truth. Yet neither could he reconcile himself to take credit for liberality when he was simply discharging a debt; nor deem it fair to let his wife continue ignorantly to lavish her care upon the little fellow whose existence was an affront to her, and whose admission to her household might one day fill it with bitterness and confusion.

The uncertainty of his thoughts naturally imparted equal vacillation to Leicester's manner. He was irresistibly drawn towards his progeny, beautiful, healthy, full of life and glee, endowed with all manner of infantile graces and blandishments, but feared to show his fondness, lest he should be thought to display more than a common interest in the stranger child. The likeness troubled him too; he could not bring Jasmine's face near his own without a dread that some one would notice their resemblance. While, therefore, he at one time encouraged the boy's frequent visits, and took apparent pleasure in his caresses, at another he assumed an indifferent air, and if he did not actually repel demonstrations he had previously invited, seemed ill at ease in the child's presence.

Anna, who watched him attentively, knew not how to interpret his demeanour, so frequently did it vary, and so contradictory were the forms it took. If she strove to meet his wishes by keeping Jasmine at a distance, or receiving him at hours when Hyacinth was not in the way, he would enquire almost anxiously after the boy, and steal down to the cottage to romp with him or carry him proofs of kind remembrance. Yet if he came upon her so engaged, his greeting would be cool, and his countenance would wear an indefinable look, which could not be called one of annoyance, but partook certainly of embarrassment. She had no difficulty in tracing most of these caprices to their true source. That he would, sooner or later, acquire a knowledge, more or less precise, of the tie between her godson and himself, was what she had always expected; how the discovery would affect him was the point at which her sagacity failed her. A frank explanation on the subject would be, she felt, by far the most satisfactory mode of disposing of it once for all; but it was not for her to initiate the discussion. To do so, she must fasten upon her husband a charge for which she had no stronger foundation than con-

jecture; he might not choose to acknowledge in set terms a claim he would tacitly have recognised, and much awkwardness might thereby be created. A waiting policy was evidently her truest wisdom.

One day, when Jasmine was spending the afternoon at the Lodge, Hyacinth appeared particularly restless. At first, he took his share in entertaining the youthful guest, played at hide-and-seek with him, related a most wonderful story for his edification, and laughed heartily at his performance of "The Rat-catcher's Daughter." By and by, his spirits seemed to flag; he wandered in and out of the room without any apparent object; took up the paper, and threw it down again unread; rose and came forward as if about to speak, and returned to his seat without effecting his intention, his changing countenance offering further proof of some unusual agitation. Anna thought he was worried by the little lad's somewhat noisy mirth, and rang the bell for the nurse to take the latter out in the grounds.

"He is just arriving at the riotous stage," said she apologetically, as Jasmine was seen bounding over the lawn; "and has, I fear,

cost you a head-ache, which must not occur again."

"It is not that," answered Leycester, lifting his flushed face from the cushion on which he had laid it; "but . . . I must speak; I cannot see you fondling that child . . . it is not right . . . Anna, do you know whose child it is?"

He came close beside her, and listened intently for her reply, which was long in coming.

"I can guess," she said at last, without looking up.

"You can! and in spite of that, you have extended your protection to it, fulfilling the duty its unnatural parents neglected? You could so far smother your just resentment, and abstain from even the shadow of reproach? Oh, Anna, this was indeed to heap coals of fire upon my head."

He sank down on the ground before her, quite abashed.

"You misapprehend my motives," said Mrs. Leycester, softly stroking his wavy hair. "It was not in spite of that knowledge, but because of it, that I acted as I did. My own Hyacinth, have you still to learn that I love you with no

petty or partial affection, but that my whole soul is yours, and that I am no more capable of an emotion hostile to, or apart from you, than my arm is of movement without, or contrary to the impulse of my will? Judge then if your child, your own flesh and blood, could be otherwise than precious to me?"

With some difficulty she raised his head, which was bowed upon her knees. His bright eyes were suffused with tears.

When Anna came to learn the whole story, which was not told her at once, but unfolded by fragments, as occasion served, she derived from it the slender consolation that it might have been worse! It was not a case of deliberate seduction, but a surrender to temptation such as few men have virtue enough to resist; the acquaintance had preceded his marriage, and was now broken off entirely; the wife was not liable to be brought in contact with her rival, nor the child to be claimed by any other family.

Mrs. Leycester immediately proposed taking him into the house, and giving him therein his true place of a son. Hyacinth demurred at first; questions would be asked, remarks made, which it might be disagreeable to hear and an-

swer. But she professed herself ready to encounter her share of such embarrassments.

"All disguises and equivocations," argued she, "are bad; they lead to more trouble than they save, and throw a dubious light even upon a good intention. Say a fault has been committed; let it be frankly recognised, and it is half atoned for; but attempt to deceive the world, and that vigilant Argus will repay you with contempt and pitiless exposure. There is no need to go about open-mouthed, proclaiming one's private affairs; but there are eyes about us quite sharp enough, you may depend upon it, to spy out the fact, colour it how we will. If you take my advice, you will affect no mystery at all on the subject, but leave people to their inevitable conclusions, and have the awkwardness over at once. It will be a nine-days' wonder; the gossips will have their say about it, though they will probably not inflict it upon you; a little raillery you may undergo from your equals; and there will be an end of the matter."

"But the boy. Would you inform him of his parentage?"

"I would neither inform, nor study to con-

ceal. He calls me 'mama' and 'godmama' indifferently; he will readily fall into the way of calling you 'papa;' at his age he will not trouble himself to enquire by what right he so addresses us. When the time for curiosity arrives, let him be told as much of the truth as he can understand, or cares to learn; one can never settle such points beforehand. My aim would simply be to let him grow up gradually to a perception of the case, without a formal explanation on the one hand, or the shock of a sudden and perhaps unfriendly disclosure on the other."

Anna's plans were ultimately adopted. The little blossom was transplanted into the kindly soil of which she was mistress, took root there, and flourished.

CHAPTER XII.

"This mixture of frivolousness and heroism is perhaps the most seducing of any thing in the eyes of a woman. A confused presage that this pretty little creature who trifles at the toilette, who caresses his dear self, who admires his own sweet person, will, perhaps, in two months time throw himself in the face of a battery, upon a squadron of the enemy, or climb like a grenadier up a mined breach! this presage gives to the gentilities of a fine gentleman an air of the marvellous, which creates admiration and tenderness."

MARMONTEL.

HAD Mrs. Leycester acted wisely in admitting "the son of a strange woman" into her domestic circle? After a generous impulse there often comes a reaction, when we distrust our own judgment in forsaking the beaten track, and attempting a higher flight than the common sense or common humanity of mankind usually reaches. We doubt if it be not folly or presumption to dissent from the general view, and fear that instead of having larger conceptions, nobler aims than the majority of our neighbours, we are only less prudent and sagacious. Some misgivings of this kind occasionally crossed Mrs.

Leycester's mind, and disturbed her pleasure in Jasmine's prosperity.

Her project, as might be expected, did not meet with universal approval. Hildhurst, on the whole, was favorable. "Madam was a right good lady," the villagers said, when they came to understand how the case stood, "and it was but fair the master should provide for his own flesh and blood." The vicar laid it down that reparation was the best penance for offences against the second table of the law. The maids at the Lodge, with feminine indifference to abstract principles, simply declared the child was a love, and took after master wonderful! The butler questioned how long society would hold together, if that sort of thing were encouraged. The cook did not care, as long as there was no nursery dinner to get ready. Anderson reserved his opinion; you might as easily have drawn an ambassador into frank conversation upon a political crisis.

At the head of the malcontents was Lady Wilfred Grafton; her sister-in-law's conduct was indelicate, *selon lui*, not to say indecent, a gross outrage upon decorum. Grafton himself rather applauded the measure. The Reverend Sidney

Aguilar shook his consecrated head: a child not born in "holy wedlock" was little better, in his eyes, than an imp of darkness, and ought to be hid away in monastic seclusion, not obtruded upon Christian wives and mothers, who,—being without sin themselves, had, of course, every right to cast stones at those who were less immaculate. His wife concurred in his sentence, being secretly ill-pleased that an uncle whose inheritance her numerous brood might have reaped, should have found a more direct heir. Lord Etheredge said it was ——— nonsense; a precious houseful of brats a man might be saddled with, if he went about collecting his little pledges! Veronica wondered; she had not yet discovered the healing balm there is in a child's embrace. Mrs. Fitzmaurice, divided between scorn and sympathy, declared it was just like Cinthy. Lord Wells sneered; Sir Philip Lawrence admired (he believed in Hyacinth to an unlimited extent); Mr. Dacre shrugged his shoulders. To timid people, it appeared a bold step; the precise pronounced it improper; the selfish, inconvenient.

Hyacinth troubled himself very little about the views entertained of his proceedings. Dis-

regard of social criticism had always been a marked trait in his character. In small matters as in great, he did mostly what was good in his own eyes; his dress, his modes of procedure, his habits of living, were in a great measure regulated by his own fancy, not by the rules laid down by the voice of the majority. This will be considered a defect, or a source of strength, according to the view persons are disposed to take of that intricate problem, human nature. Without entering upon the general question, it may be affirmed that to Leycester, whose impulses were seldom unamiable, this spirit of independence was on the whole an advantage. It might lead him into some eccentricities of demeanour, but when he did get a right notion into his head, it enabled him to defy ridicule, and overcome that "fear of man, which bringeth a snare."

On the present occasion, he adhered with unshrinking firmness to the line of conduct justice seemed to him to point out. Having his wife's free consent to bring up Rita's child as his own, he accepted the paternal office without affectation of any kind, and set himself to fulfil its various duties to the best of his ability. If now

and then he felt it painful to produce this involuntary witness against himself, the annoyance was borne as a merited penalty: he would not banish the innocent child to save himself a blush. But neither did he grow morbid on the subject, and increase the weight of his burden by carrying it awry. The grace which attached to his most trifling actions (which grace De Custine defines to be an amiable mind embodied in the carriage and the attitudes) did not forsake him here. He had ceased to think lightly of his errors, nor did he speak lightly of them on occasions when seriousness was demanded; but among those who could not enter into his feelings on the subject, he laughed it off with a pleasant bashfulness, which disarmed equally censure and sarcasm.

Anna was delighted at the serenity with which he went through the ordeal. She had feared he would soon be weary of well-doing, and lack constancy to sustain the work he had had the courage to undertake; but for once in her life she had rated her volatile husband at less than he was worth. His tact relieved her of one main source of uneasiness, and enabled her to bear the strictures passed upon them with great

equanimity. It was a topic upon which they never invited discussion; if forced upon them, they took refuge in no evasion or ingenious diversion, but stood calmly on their defence.

For the sake of clearness, we have grouped under one head the various opinions expressed by relations and acquaintances as they severally learnt the story of the adopted child. But in so doing, we have somewhat anticipated the order of events. All these persons did not acquire the intelligence at the same moment; months elapsed before it became known to more than the neighbours and a few very intimate friends. It was therefore with the effect produced on her husband himself that Anna was chiefly concerned, during the period immediately succeeding Jasmine's establishment as a member of the family. If Hyacinth tired of the charge, or the boy proved a cause of discord between his real and his adopted parent, she would have to blame herself only.

A short trial served to disperse her misgivings on this head. Hyacinth's mind fastened with eagerness upon the new interest thus introduced into his existence. He devoted himself to the child with untiring assiduity, played with him,

devised costumes for him, taught him to read, to sing, to ride on the smallest of Shetland ponies, besides cultivating his manners, and giving him little moral lectures with really admirable earnestness and simplicity. He seemed likely in fact to teach himself the whole duty of man by dint of his efforts to impress it upon his pupil.

Jasmine repaid these cares with warm attachment. He had from the first displayed a strong predilection for Mr. Leycester, whether drawn by the secret tie of blood, or attracted by the personal charms that act so powerfully upon a young imagination. If Hyacinth had not been thoroughly satiated with adulation already, he could not have escaped spoiling now, between a wife who adored him as the Greeks did their deities, with all their imperfections freely recognised, and a child whose unconscious flatteries were even more intoxicating; for Jasmine gazed upon him as on a superior being, and even in his most familiar moments retained something of reverence for the divinity that stooped to be his play-fellow. The princely heroes of all the fairy tales in which he delighted were invested by him with his father's features; but there were some

points about the latter,—his noiseless footfall, his musical voice, never strained in mirth, anger, or impatience, beyond its natural pitch, the delicate perfume always floating about him,—that seemed to belong to the inhabitant of regions more ethereal than a Court. With the addition of wings, he would have responded pretty nearly to Jasmine's ideal of tutelary angels, and gods who came down in the likeness of men. In spite of this vague feeling of veneration, however, the two were very merry together, and Anna was no less happy in watching their mirth.

But deeper consequences than the amusement of the moment were to flow from her hazardous experiment. Engrossed with the care of his child, Mr. Leycester's thoughts were diverted from less harmless objects; desires and fancies born of idleness, died out in the wholesome atmosphere of the domestic circle; he began to grow steadier under his novel responsibilities, and was more likely to avoid in future the fault he was taking so much pains to repair.

Nor, while these benefits accrued to her husband, did Anna suffer any loss. It might have been apprehended that the boy would usurp too

large a share of his father's affections, and weaken the childless wife's hold over him, instead of which the little one supplied the very link wanting between them. Hyacinth had been greatly touched at this last proof of devotion; it especially pleased him that Jasmine had been delicately nurtured, and brought up in all respects as a gentleman's son. Besides the admiration and gratitude engendered by Anna's conduct, he could not see the boy upon her knees without feeling towards her the tenderness with which all but the most unworthy of men regard the mother of their children. If she had not borne him offspring, she had given his own to his arms, and evinced a truly maternal affection for it. Often, when in the midst of their games, or of the caresses which the little lad was wont to bestow, the happy father caught her eye, he would stretch out his hand and draw her into the group, and thank her in murmured words, or by more eloquent action, for the bliss he enjoyed through her means.

Jasmine too showed no diminution of attachment to his first friend; she had too early taken possession of his infant heart to be easily supplanted, and he but fulfilled her wishes in grant-

ing his real parent a share. He was a very winning child, clever, though not much addicted to study; impetuous, yet tractable; full of life and vivacity, without being over boisterous; affectionate, and free from guile. The mixture of southern blood in his veins was likely to render him more energetic and hotter-tempered than his father, and better training would probably form a more solid character, though he might lack the peculiar fascination attaching to Mr. Leicester, which resulted, perhaps, in no slight degree, from the combination of qualities not only opposite but apparently inconsistent. We admire a manly disposition in men, and feminine virtues in women; but when the weaker sex display courage and resolution, when gentleness and forbearance are exhibited by the strong, our admiration is raised by the surprise to a greater height. Thus the finer traits of spirit, endurance, delicacy, rectitude, generosity shone out in Hyacinth with added lustre, because set in strong relief against the effeminate, self-indulgent, libertine habits in which he had grown up. Few expected such choice products from so ill-tended a soil.

As his mind recovered a healthy tone, he re-

sumed those habits of active benevolence which had been partly suspended during the latter weeks of his stay in town. For it is vain to suppose that we can make a compromise with duty, and continue blameless on all other points, while we allow ourselves in any one known sin. That single vice will most surely deteriorate the general character, even as

"The little rift within the lute,
That by and by will make the music mute,
Or little pitted speck in garner'd fruit,
That rotting inward slowly moulders all."

The wilful entertainment of an unlawful desire, though it did not ripen into crime, was sufficient to blunt the edge of Hyacinth's humane zeal, and diminish his interest in whatever did not concern his own immediate gratification. He was surprised, and somewhat humiliated, to perceive how soon he had stood still in a good path, even of his own choosing, and acquired thereby a salutary distrust of himself, which is by no means one of the least valuable lessons to be learnt by a neophyte in religion.

Jasmine was frequently his companion in his visits to the surrounding poor; he wished to train the child early to take thought for others,

and to impress on him the conviction that while want and sorrow abound at our doors, no man is justified in leading an utterly useless life, and squandering exclusively on idle pleasure the wealth he holds but as a steward.

"Let us eat, drink, and be merry, my son," he would say. "That, I conceive, is our right, if God give us the appetite and the means. But we shall be all the merrier for having helped others to eat and drink likewise."

One afternoon, being in the village, he proposed making a circuit of half a mile or so to call upon one of his pensioners, a young man in the last stage of consumption, whom he had not seen for several days. Anna dissuaded him, thinking he had walked enough for one day: the invalid, she could assure him, was well provided with every necessary.

"Yes, but a visitor now and then cheers him up a little, poor fellow. I know what it is to lie for months together, with nothing but pain to break the monotony of existence."

Anna had no power to object further, and they went to the sick chamber, where their presence and unobtrusive sympathy diffused as much pleasure as their gifts. There was no for-

mality, no parade of condescension in their manner; they entered the lowly tenement with no more, and no less ceremony than they would have used at a friend's house, and did not, like some well-meaning people, think to raise the dying youth's spirits by dwelling upon gloomy topics, or letting him see that they found the visit a bore. Hyacinth remained in cheerful conversation with him, while Anna drew the mother aside to hear the doctor's last report, and to ascertain if anything was wanting that money could supply. It was getting dusk when they left the house.

"Stifling, is it not, in those low rooms," said Leycester, wiping his forehead. The perfumed cambric suggested a vivid sense of contrast. "My God!" he exclaimed, with irrepressible emotion, "what am I, that I should be so much more tenderly dealt with?"

Anna clasped his arm, and drew it within hers. He leant upon her rather heavily as they proceeded, and showed evident signs of fatigue.

"How dreary this common looks in the fading light," observed Mrs. Leycester as they struck across it.

"A capital time and place for highwaymen,"

said Hyacinth, rousing himself from the reverie in which he had been sunk. "It is almost to be lamented that there are no such perils now to give a spice of adventure to a twilight ramble."

"I cannot say I share your regret," said Anna, glancing nervously round, "and the trade is not quite extinct yet. There were three separate accounts in the *Times* this morning, of people being stopped on lonely roads and robbed."

"Well, don't take to your heels before the enemy is in sight," laughed Hyacinth, as she unconsciously quickened her pace. "Here we are within view of the park palings, beyond which, at least, we are secure from assault, unless a blundering gamekeeper should mistake us for untimely poachers."

"It shows how far fancy goes," said Anna, smiling at herself, "but I could have declared just now I saw something crouching down behind that bush, close by the gate."

"A robber, or a ghost?" said Leycester. "One is nearly as obsolete as the other, in this prosaic part of the world."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth, when a man sprang from the brushwood, and presenting a pistol at Hyacinth, demanded, in

time-honoured phraseology, their money or their lives! It was curious to mark the sudden reversal of their position. The wife, who had so lately supported her husband's steps, now, with womanly instinct, clung to him for protection; while he, braced by the presence of danger, at once stood erect. She felt the muscles of the arm she held contract, while with the cane in his right hand he struck up the weapon pointed at his head, and quick as thought pinned the assailant against the fence.

"Now, Anna, get on the other side of the gate," he said, in the calmest possible tone, without, however, removing his eye for an instant from his antagonist's face. "You, my fine fellow, have mistaken your game entirely. If you really are in sore distress, come up to the house yonder, and we will see what can be done for you; but I can't stay talking here in the damp."

The would-be thief was so utterly confounded at the sudden repulse of his attack, and the coolness of this speech, that the idea of further violence never entered his brain. His boldness was fairly quelled by his opponent's superior pluck, though he did not estimate it at its full

worth, for he believed the cane, which was rather a stout one, concealed a blade, and that Leycester's confidence was based upon the possession of the means of defence. When he spoke, therefore, it was only to hint doubts of the trustworthiness of the proposal;—he was to be decoyed to the house, he muttered, making a vain attempt to wriggle away from durance, and given up to the constable.

"Bah!" ejaculated Hyacinth, with supreme disdain. "It is only the weak who are treacherous. Because you lurk in a dark corner, with firearms, to pounce upon a man whom you suppose to be unarmed, and encumbered with a lady—forgive me the phrase, Anna!—you fancy me as cowardly a fellow as yourself. Yes, cowardly," he repeated, in answer to the man's involuntary gesture; "there is nothing brave in wayside robbery and murder. If you mean to profit by my offer, march on in front."

The disheartened foe cast a lingering look at his pistol, lying far off on the grass, and obeyed without further parley. Leycester picked it up and rejoined his wife, with whom he slowly followed in the wake of his prisoner. Anna could not recover from her surprise at the turn affairs

had taken. After a fervent thanksgiving for their safety, she broke out in exclamations of wonder at the scene.

"How came you to think of such an expedient, Cinthy? How could you venture to act upon it? I tremble still to think of what might have happened if you had been less prompt, or he more ferocious."

"It was a desperate resource, no doubt," said Hyacinth quietly. "I could not have sustained a conflict with a hulking fellow like that for two minutes, and had he put out his strength should have been dead before assistance could have reached me. Diplomacy averted the fatal struggle, as it has done in more important cases. His tone, I noticed, was not very assured; his aim was unsteady; deprived of his weapon, he lost heart immediately, as I expected. My benevolent proposal prevented his working himself up to the courage of desperation."

"But how could you contemplate all these contingencies in that minute?"

"Necessity is a wonderful sharpener of the wits, lady mine."

"And what do you intend to do with him when you get him home?"

"Feed him well, and talk to him quietly. He can't be an old hand, or he would not have been cowed so easily. We may be the means of snatching him from a vile and ruinous career."

When they came within sight of the house, Hyacinth sent Anna home the direct way, and calling the man to his side, led him round to the outbuildings, first firing off the pistol to show how little he feared harm or meant mischief. Softened by contact with a nature at once so dauntless and so kindly, the crest-fallen bandit told his story of a minor offence against the laws, followed by committal to gaol, release with a ticket-of-leave, difficulty of procuring employment, semi-starvation, and the final attempt to supply his extreme need by preying on the community. He had bought an old pistol, more for show than use, as he was not very expert at handling firearms, and was prowling about in search of a victim, when the Leycesters came in sight.

"And this was really your first appearance in the part?" remarked Hyacinth, when the tale was concluded. "Well, my friend, I can't compliment you upon your performance, and would not advise you to repeat it. The business has

ceased to be a profitable one, and you are not, methinks, ruffianly enough to carry it out with more than the average success. Supposing you had executed your project of rifling my pockets, you would have obtained—let us see—just eighteen-pence, which I have much pleasure in making over to you, and a watch, crested and lettered, which would infallibly have got you into trouble as soon as you tried to turn it into money. Had you been tempted to overcome my resistance by force, what remained for you but a shameful death, or a miserably-blasted life? The stain of blood is an ugly thing, believe me, and very hard to wipe out.”

“I did not intend to hurt your honour,” faltered the man,—William Monk he called himself.

“Possibly not,” returned Hyacinth, drily; “but I should have made a pretty stiff fight for my property, and loaded pistols will go off in a scuffle, besides being very handy for silencing an antagonist, if you happen to hit him over the head in the right place. When I went out this afternoon, *I* did not *intend* to bring you home with me. But here we are now at the rear of my premises. If you like to take up your

quarters for the night in this barn, you shall have some supper and a blanket, and to-morrow we will see what more can be done for you. The key will be turned outside to prevent your walking in your sleep; I suppose I may trust you not to set the place on fire?"

The offer being accepted, with a quiet expression of gratitude, for Mr. Monk was evidently not a man of many words, Hyacinth installed him in the barn, and went to give directions for his nutriment and safe custody. As he entered the house, Ben Mio came bounding up to greet him.

"Ah, recreant!" cried his master; "why were you absent to-day of all days, when you might have done me good service, and distinguished yourself in the fray?"

The animal wagged his tail apologetically. He had that afternoon, for almost the first time, followed Jasmine and the pony, instead of sticking as usual close to Mr. Leicester's side.

The adventure worked a singular change in Anna's feelings towards her husband. It was perhaps impossible she could love him more; but thenceforth she respected him also. He had shown that total absence of fear which imposes

so much on the being of weaker nerves, presence of mind, and ready wit in a trying emergency; besides much goodness of heart in exerting himself to save from a course of crime the person who had just threatened his life. She sat and gazed at his slight frame, scarcely larger or more powerful than her own, and wondered what element in male blood imparted such virtue to arm and brain. This delicate creature, whom she had nursed and fondled, whose unstable character she had helped to exalt to a higher level, had all at once assumed loftier proportions, and asserted the innate superiority of his sex.

For both parties, this was well. The wife should not look down, however tenderly, upon the husband to whom she has vowed reverence and submission, as well as love and fidelity.

CHAPTER XIII.

AJAX. Do you not think, he thinks himself a better man than I am?

AGAM. No question.

AJAX. Will you subscribe his thought, and say—he is?

AGAM. No, noble Ajax; you are as valiant, as wise, no less noble, much more gentle, and altogether more tractable.

TEOILUS AND CRESSIDA.

THE night passed without any disturbance from the suspicious guest in the barn. Anna had experienced a few qualms on the subject, and woke up once or twice at slight noises in the house. She found no occasion, however, for rousing Hyacinth, who slept like a tired infant; and took courage from the sight of the revolvers, which, in the country, always lay within reach of his hand.

After breakfast, he had a long conversation with Monk, who evinced no desire to shirk enquiry. He was provided with a substantial meal, and dismissed with half-a-crown, in addition to the eighteen-pence in his pocket, to subsist upon until Leycester should have verified

his statements, and considered what had best be done for his permanent benefit. The investigation necessitated a visit to a distant village: Hyacinth arranged to ride over, while Anna drove her ponies into Maidstone on a shopping expedition.

On emerging from the stationer's, she ran against Mr. Wentworth, whom some clerical business had brought into the neighbourhood. They had met but seldom since Mrs. Leycester's marriage, of which, it may be remembered, he strongly disapproved. For his daughter's sake, however, Anna was always very civil to him; and as there was a great deal to be said about Mary, she pressed him to go back with her to Hildhurst. After some demur, he accepted her hospitality for one night.

His accounts of Mrs. Maynard were highly satisfactory; she was well and very happy; a child had been given to her arms; her husband was steady and affectionate; the old Admiral had died lately, leaving him five thousand pounds, on the strength of which they were meditating a trip to England.

When Mrs. Leycester and her guest reached Hildhurst, Hyacinth had not returned. After

making the tour of the premises, Mr. Wentworth was conducted to his apartment, with an intimation that he need not hurry in dressing, as dinner would not be served till the master of the house came home. Dressing, however, with Mr. Wentworth was a very speedy operation, consisting simply of putting on his clothes when he got up, and occasionally changing his coat for a better, or a warmer, according to the weather and the time of year. Now and then he might wash his hands a second time in the course of the day, and if the roads had been unusually muddy, his boots would perhaps be replaced by an old pair of slippers; but these were not ceremonies of daily observance. For Sundays and great occasions, he had his best suit, in which he would array himself with befitting precision; to go through that task merely to sit down by his own fireside, would have appeared to him preposterous,—a needless trouble, or an exaggerated dandyism, and a waste of time. On this occasion, being forewarned that some sort of toilet, was expected of him, he did make use of the means of ablution liberally provided, ran a comb through his bushy hair, brushed up his

coat a little (as far as he could reach without taking it off), and flicked the dust off his boots with his pocket handkerchief. This done, he descended to the drawing-room, where he looked round in some surprise at the damask chairs and embroidered cushions, in all their unshrouded splendour.

"I wonder why the covers are all taken off?" thought he. "Mrs. Leycester did not say there was company coming. Perhaps I had better have put on a clean neck-cloth, however."

To repair the omission, he hastened upstairs, and opened what he supposed to be the door of his apartment, but was, in reality, that of Hyacinth's dressing-room, as some articles of male attire, laid out for wear, unmistakably testified. Mr. Wentworth glanced from the pictures and statuettes, to the toilet-table with its multifarious appendages, including, besides a glittering display of gold and ivory, glass and porcelain, a variety of small implements the uses whereof were unknown to the gazer, and beyond it to a smaller apartment, fitted up as a bath.

"Insufferable coxcomb!" muttered he. "The fellow must spend half his days in this ridiculous baby-house, making himself a more absurd figure

than nature meant him to be. Not content with being curled and colored like a hair-dresser's bust, a misfortune he might have surmounted by this time by leading a hardy life, he pampers himself with hot baths, and keeps his hands smooth, I warrant, with almond paste! How any woman can put up with . . . "

The sound of horses' feet on the gravel without interrupted his meditations, and warned him to beat a retreat. He reached his own room, as Hyacinth, wearied with a long day employed on an object of the purest philanthropy, dismounted at the door. Anna hastened to meet her husband, and apprize him of the guest she had brought home.

"*O ciel!*" exclaimed the young man with a rueful visage. "How am I to get through an evening with that grim old puritan? I don't know in the least what to say to him, and am much too tired to hunt for ideas."

"It is a bore, I admit; but if you will only look bland, I will take the conversation upon me. We shall dine late, and he will be glad to retire early; so the interval will not be very hard to fill."

"Well, I will do my best to look amiable; but mind, I don't engage to keep awake."

"Oh, that is not essential," returned Mrs. Leycester; "nor perhaps desirable. If you go quietly to sleep, there can be no jarring of opinions between you, and your long ride will form a plausible excuse. I must not stop now to ask what you have heard, as that unfortunate man is alone in the drawing room all this while."

She smoothed away the slight crease on her husband's brow, and left him in Anderson's hands, while she went down to entertain her visitor.

Mr. Wentworth eyed her dress—of *moiré* antique, the long full skirt forming a demi-train, a black lace jacket only half concealing her white arms and throat, sprays of flowering laurel in her hair,—and his fears of a party revived.

"I am afraid now you have decoyed me into a gay circle, which I did not reckon on when accepting your offer of a dinner and a bed," observed he.

"No, I assure you we expect no one. We should not have been so late had not Mr. Leycester been detained by business."

"Punctuality, I suppose, is too common place a virtue for so fine a gentleman."

To relieve her husband from this reproach, Anna gave Mr. Wentworth a sketch of the affair which had taken Hyacinth so far from home. To her surprise, the worthy clergyman, who was also a magistrate, expressed no approbation.

"A wild scheme, ma'am, depend upon it—a very wild scheme. No good is ever done in these cases, by departing from the established method of procedure. You had much better have called in a constable, and allowed the law to take its course."

"The law does not seem to have succeeded very brilliantly in this particular instance. Here was this man, with a blemished character, let loose upon the world to sink or swim as he could. If we give him up to justice, the same process will be repeated, with this difference, that after every imprisonment society will become more distrustful, and he more reckless, till some frightful crime, perhaps, fills a whole district with dismay, and finally arrests his career."

"And what remedy, pray, do you in your wisdom recommend for this state of things?"

Would you never convict a malefactor at all, or keep him in perpetual durance?"

"We do not aspire to settle the vexed question of penal legislation; but this case being specially brought before us, we are endeavouring to deal with it according to our notions of what a greater lawgiver than Moses would have done. If we should be so happy as to convert a sinner from the error of his way, you will not deny that my husband—for the idea is his—my Hyacinth, whom rigid censors deride as frivolous, or denounce as profane, will have done more practical good than half the philanthropic talkers of the day."

To which Mr. Wentworth responded with provoking coolness: "I give Mr. Leycester credit for his idea, and am glad to find that he is not wholly absorbed in the vanities of the world; but as a practical man, I must beg leave to doubt the prudence of such amateur experiments. If he should fail, there is a thief the more at large, and he lays himself open to the charge of misprison of felony. Don't be alarmed, however, on that account," added he laughing, as Anna changed countenance; "I promise you not to inform against him. Is not some one trying that door?"

As he spoke it was pushed open, and Ben Mio stalked gravely into the room.

"Oh, now then we may ring for dinner," said Anna, pulling the bell; "Mr. Leycester is not far behind."

He entered at the moment, redolent of Windsor soap and eau-de-Cologne, and advancing with frank courtesy towards Mr. Wentworth, bade him welcome to Hildhurst. The two men offered a striking contrast as they stood side by side; and were vaguely conscious of the fact. Hyacinth, in a black velvet jacket and the neatest of kid boots, leaning with languid grace against the mantelpiece while his wife fastened a sprig of geranium in his button-hole, covertly inspected his guest, and pronounced him a boor. Mr. Wentworth, intolerant (as we are all prone to be) of habits and tastes foreign to his own, viewed his host with disdain, and summed up his demerits in the one word "Fop."

The rector's austerity, however, did not extend to all mundane matters. To the pleasures of the table he was susceptible enough; and his visage cleared at the sight of the well-spread board, before which he was shortly seated. He found no fault with the number or the ex-

cellence of the dishes submitted to him; what did surprise him was the festive appearance of the repast—the flowers, the delicate china, the abundance of light. With his thoroughly British middle-class ideas, he marvelled that people should take so much trouble for the gratification of their own taste, or in honor of a single guest. Once or twice in a year he was accustomed to assemble his neighbours at a solemn banquet, when all his stores of plate were produced, and no expense was spared to make a grand display; but he never dreamt of wasting ceremony upon his intimate friends, much less of gilding his own daily meals by the style of serving them.

In the intervals of his devotion to the delicacies set before him, he could not but remark Mr. Leycester's temperate participation in them. He drank soda-water with a dash of Chablis in it, and did little more than taste what he took on his plate, conveying an occasional morsel to Ben Mio, who sat by his side. Mrs. Leycester seemed chiefly occupied in looking after her husband. Seeing him lean back wearily in his chair, she sent for a cushion to place behind him—an attention he acknowledged by a smile that lighted

up his whole countenance. Mr. Wentworth observed the sudden irradiation.

"Yes, you can look very pleasant when all goes smoothly with you," thought he; "but I wonder what sort of face you put on when anything thwarts your humour."

The footman jogged his chair at that minute, and caused him to turn round with a very impatient expression, which, perhaps, flustered the man's nerves, for on removing a large dish immediately after, he let drop a knife which fell across Hyacinth's hand. He twisted his handkerchief round it so quietly that Anna did not notice the accident.

When dessert was placed on the table, Mr. Wentworth began to consider how he should get through the half-hour during which custom would compel him to remain *tête-à-tête* with his host. He could not well enter into the merits of Archdeacon Denison's case, nor argue the question of a new translation of the Bible; secular politics, even, were probably beyond the grasp of Mr. Leycester's mind: what common ground could they discover? He was saved the necessity, however, of solving that difficulty. The lady of the house kept her seat

until he appeared to have imbibed a sufficient quantity of Port, when she proposed an adjournment to the drawing-room; and Hyacinth, rising at the same time, rang the bell, and prepared to follow her.

"We adopt the foreign fashion here," said he, holding the door open for his guest to pass out, "which does not involve a dreary separation of the sexes. When at a set banquet I see the fairer half of the company disappear, I always feel inclined to dive under their skirts, and make my escape with them. It's much pleasanter talking to women, don't you think?"

"Requires less expenditure of intellect," observed Mr. Wentworth drily.

"I am not so sure of that," rejoined Hyacinth. "The ladies are confoundedly quick-witted, and much better up in their geography and history, and so forth, than the majority of us men. They are down upon you in a moment if you trip over a date, and smile compassionately at your blundering French and villanous Italian. I believe they would detect you, if you tried to impose false Latin upon them!"

"You seem to entertain exalted notions of the sex."

“Like every one who knows them well, Sir. It is only the ignorant or the insensible, fellows with shallow brains or narrow hearts, that affect to despise the crowning work of creation. Besides,” added Hyacinth, sliding into his wonted light manner, “I am bound to have a high opinion of their discernment, seeing how justly they have always appreciated me.”

Mr. Wentworth glanced obliquely at him, like a horse that has a mind to shy; but Leycester's blue eyes gleamed with such an expression of mirthful defiance, that the enemy thought it as well not to provoke hostilities.

As soon as they had entered the drawing-room coffee was served, such coffee as is seldom met with in English houses, prepared by Anderson, on a system acquired abroad. He brought it in himself, and on presenting his master with his cup, took occasion to say:

“Thomas is in great distress, sir, about the wound he was so unfortunate as to inflict upon your wrist. The housekeeper has some excellent healing ointment, if you would allow her or me to apply it.”

“I am much obliged to her, but the matter is not so serious as all that. The cut was not a

deep one, as you may see," said Hyacinth, holding up his hand, "and wants nothing but a bit of sticking-plaster. Pray tell Thomas to make himself easy."

Anna, coming up with an eager face, applied hip-salve before resorting to any other remedy. "And now I must insist upon your lying down," she said, "you look quite fagged again to-night. Mr. Wentworth will excuse you, I am sure."

That gentleman, of course, begged that his presence might be no impediment. He had been an amused spectator of the foregoing scene.

"What a fuss, to be sure, is made about this young man!" so his mental comment ran. "If he cuts his finger, the whole household is in commotion; wife, housekeeper, valet, footman, are all in a state of alarm on his account. I wonder what my servants would care if I chopped my hand off."

It might have occurred to him that there must be something amiable in the despised exquisite to call forth such universal goodwill. Whatever infatuation might possess his wife, it was not likely his domestics would manifest such solicitude for a master whose only merit was to shine.

in a boudoir. If his demeanour to them were not as conciliatory as his manner in society was polished; if before these mute witnesses he were inconsiderate, exacting, irritable, guilty of petty meanness or degrading vice, he might purchase their services, but never command their affection.

But Mr. Wentworth had as confirmed a habit of dealing out characters wholesale, as any third-rate playwright. Those infinite gradations in which nature delights, were lost upon his indiscriminating eye. He could distinguish an oak from a holly; the minute difference between each leaf on the same tree, the curious approximation between the leaves of different species (as, for instance, between oak and geranium), these he mostly overlooked. So with mankind: he ticked them all off as fool, or knave, shrewd fellows, or worthy persons. That a long-headed man should be capable of arrant folly, or a dullard show occasional gleams of sense, a saint fall into grievous sin, or a reprobate evince some traces of rectitude and high feeling, was a perpetual surprise to the unphilosophical rector; nor could he comprehend that two fops, two pedants, two misers or spendthrifts, might have

nothing in common but the name. Hence he seldom arrived at a thorough apprehension of any character removed from the most ordinary type; and Hyacinth Leycester, of all others, was an inscrutable mystery to him.

When her husband was comfortably arranged on the sofa, Mrs. Leycester drew off Mr. Wentworth's attention by producing some books calculated to interest him, and engaging him in discussion thereupon. The evening thus passed rapidly, and it was not till the *campagnard*, who kept early hours, rose to retire for the night, that his host's silence attracted his notice. Hyacinth had yielded with scarcely a struggle to the drowsiness that crept over him, and lay placidly asleep among his cushions. Now, so little had Mr. Wentworth's conversation been addressed to him, that his taking no part in it had hitherto passed unobserved; yet on making the above discovery, the good gentleman was half disposed to resent such indifference to his powers of rhetoric. That Mr. Leycester should be as unconcerned about his views as he was about Mr. Leycester's, appeared to him, not the most natural thing in the world, but strange and offensive. Moreover, to a man of his strictly

regular habits, who never ate but at meal times, nor indulged in a nap except under cover of a four-poster, there was something shocking in the spectacle of a person abandoning himself to his sensations, and taking his rest, when weary, on the first chair or sofa that came to hand. Reading disapprobation in his countenance, Anna hastened to offer some apology for the delinquent.

"During his long confinement, you see, night and day became very much alike. There was no going to bed, or getting up for him; he lost the habit of sleeping at fixed periods, and dozed off whenever the fit took him. Even now his eyelids will occasionally droop at odd hours, and I never interfere, except from positive necessity, with Nature's dictates."

"The dictates, or caprices, of Nature outweigh then, in your estimation, the moral benefit as well as the great physical advantages of early rising and regularity of life?"

"I have not considered the question morally," replied Anna, smiling at the rector's seriousness: "and am heretic enough to dispute some of the old saws on that subject. Are we, in truth, so very wise to cut up our lives into little bits, all of the same size and pattern, so losing half

the varied beauty of the seasons? What do they who go to bed invariably at ten o'clock, know of the solemn glories of night? What do those who make a merit of rising every day at six, see of the splendours of the summer sunrise? Foreign nations, methinks, are more sensible than ourselves in profiting by many an hour of cool evening, and calm starlight, and fresh dawn, which is wasted upon us English, with our pertinacious adherence to routine. The very proverbs of the continent satirize our unreasoning formality in these matters."

"Oh! if you come to proverbs," cried Mr. Wentworth, "they are dead against you.

'Early to bed, early to rise
Makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.'

"I will grant you the health," interposed Anna, in haste to avert the threatened shower of adages. "Perhaps it is conducive to longevity to observe primitive hours; as to the wealth and the wisdom, I demur. A farmer, no doubt, must be early a-field; shopkeepers, mechanics, labourers may increase their gains by setting to work betimes; but how much richer would my husband be for breakfasting every morning at seven?

While wisdom is symbolized by a bird of night, and sages have generally been noted for preferring the 'midnight oil' to the beams of the rising sun."

"One maxim recurs to me with great force: 'Never contend with women;'" said Mr. Wentworth, taking up his candle. "Allow me to inquire whether breakfast, in this informal house, is a moveable feast, and if so, by what rule I may calculate its occurrence?"

"Nothing is easier," answered Anna. "Ring for it, as soon as you are ready. Breakfast, with us, is not an institution, like dinner; no one here waits for any one else."

Of all the shocks Mr. Wentworth had undergone that day, this was the most startling. Married people in the habit of taking their morning coffee separately, must be capable of any sort of domestic treason! They must be undergoing a process of slow demoralization, against which he should think it his duty to warn at least one of them. Oblivion fell upon him during the composition of the intended lecture.

CHAPTER XIV.

"That man is of a temper too severe,
Hard, but as lofty as the rock, and free
From all the taints of common earth—while I
Am softer clay, impregnated with flowers :
But as our mould is, must the produce be.
If I have err'd this time, 'tis on the side
Where error sits most lightly."

SARDANAPALUS.

ANNA had taken no pains to avoid disturbing her husband, but she would not rouse him forcibly, and break his slumber for the sake of getting him to bed. After wishing Mr. Wentworth good night, she took up a book, and settled herself in an easy chair to read. The cessation, however, of the hum of voices, in the midst of which Hyacinth had dropped asleep, produced the same effect upon him as a sudden noise. He opened his eyes and sat up.

"What! all alone, Anna? Is it late? Where's the parson? or did I dream I heard his harsh, unmodulated drone? That man would drive me into a nervous fever, if I had to listen to him for long together."

"He is safe between his blankets at present, where you ought to be, my dear sleepy one; but before we seek our pillows, tell me the result of your enquiries to-day."

From Leycester's reply, it appeared that Monk's story was confirmed by those who were competent to speak to the facts. He had borne a fair character enough up to the commission of his first offence, into which, it was supposed, bad company had decoyed him.

"By all accounts," continued Hyacinth, "he is not yet so perverted as to have acquired a distaste for honest industry. Emigration would afford him the best chance of retrieving past errors. I will talk to our vicar about it to-morrow; and if he approve, and Monk himself be willing, we might get him out to one of the colonies, where no prejudice would prevent his obtaining employment."

Anna described Mr. Wentworth's view of the case, to which Hyacinth replied: "It is just what I should have expected from his worship, and perhaps he is in the right after all. No great harm, however, can result from our scheme. If we succeed in reclaiming this embryo felon, we shall have done some good in our

generation; if we fail, we shall at least have saved the State the expense of transporting him. Why did not Jasmine show after dinner to-day?"

"Why, dear, it was very late, and I thought it a pity to keep him up beyond his usual time."

Mrs. Leycester had not been sorry of the excuse to avoid the questions his appearance would have excited; but she was not to escape so easily.

"I fancied I heard a child's voice on the stairs," said Mr. Wentworth next morning, on finding himself *tête-à-tête* with his hostess at the morning meal.

"Very likely," replied Mrs. Leycester, gazing intently into the tea-pot. "There is no keeping young people quiet."

"But what young people have you under your charge? None of your own, I believe?"

"Failing which, I have adopted one. Shall I give you a little more cream?"

Mr. Wentworth held out his cup mechanically, and drank its contents in silence, expecting some further explanation, but as Mrs. Leycester manifested no intention of continuing the subject, he was obliged to ask his way.

"Is this another of your philanthropic schemes, for diminishing juvenile vagrancy? or did you put an advertisement in the *Times* addressed to parents with children to spare?"

"I was not driven to such an expedient," returned Anna. "One need not look far abroad for a little creature requiring shelter and protection; and our little *protégé* had a claim upon us which we were very happy to acknowledge."

Before Mr. Wentworth could carry the examination further, Hyacinth made his appearance in a picturesque dishabille, followed by Jasmine, who generally attended his father's levee; and trotting down stairs after him, now entered the room with a rush. At the sight of a stranger, he pulled up suddenly, and performed a salute worthy of Sir Charles Grandison. He wore a blue velvet frock, with cambric chemisette and sleeves; his fair hair curled in rich profusion over his shoulders; and there was as much distinction in his looks and mien, as a personage of his years could well exhibit.

Mr. Wentworth's only notion of making way with children was to subject them to a string of interrogations concerning their studies. Jasmine's replies showed readiness, and clear com-

prehension, rather than book-learning; some mistakes he made, often said, "I don't know," but never gave a foolish or irrelevant answer. Matters went pretty smoothly till the article of theology was touched on.

"What is your name?" asked the rector, plunging without notice into the catechism.

"Jasmine Leycester," answered the child, looking surprised at the question in the midst of an enquiry into his geographical acquirements.

Mr. Wentworth stared; Hyacinth coloured slightly.

"He is my god-child," Anna hastened to explain.

"Who gave you that name?" pursued Mr. Wentworth.

"I don't remember," was the innocent reply.

Prompting was of no use; the young gentleman denied all knowledge of his baptism, and would not commit himself to any assertion respecting it.

"What! haven't you learnt your catechism!" cried the ecclesiastic, amazed. "I have a little boy much smaller than you, in my Sunday school, who can repeat it all through without missing a word."

Jasmine looked from one parent to the other, as if appealing to them to account for his deficiency.

"We have not thought it necessary," said Mrs. Leycester, stroking the pretty head that rested against her, "to burden his memory with a form of words, to which he could not yet attach a definite meaning. I trust, however, that he is not totally ignorant of what it concerns us most of all to know. Tell Mr. Wentworth, my darling, what each one of us must do, to show that we are Christians, or followers of Christ."

The child's bright face assumed a thoughtful expression.

"Think always of God first," he said, after a momentary pause of reflection; "of other people next, and of self last."

"All the catechisms, homilies, and creeds of all the Churches in Christendom could not improve upon that, methinks," observed Hyacinth, stooping to kiss the catechumen, and thereby bring out in strong relief the resemblance between them.

A new light dawned upon the rector, but he had no opportunity of unburthening his mind until he was again seated in the pony carriage,

on his road to the station. Mr. Leycester excused himself from accompanying their departing guest, on the plea that he had appointed that forenoon for Monk to call and hear what they proposed doing with him; but volunteered to strike across to the park gates, and see the travellers so far on their way. Jasmine was despatched for his cap, and followed Mr. Leycester out of doors, where Ben Mio was testifying, by a thousand antics, his delight at the prospect of a morning walk. Off they set all three, down the sloping lawn, at full speed; the iron rail at the lower end was cleared by man and dog at a spring; the boy clambered up one side, and was received at the top in his father's arms, whence he waved his hand in triumph to "Mamma," who was watching him from the steps.

"Mr. Leycester's late indisposition seems to have left him an increase of vivacity," remarked Mr. Wentworth, as he handed her into the carriage. "I should not have supposed him capable of such a feat of agility."

"It is the child that makes him so lively," said she. "I am alarmed for him sometimes when I see them at play together, but no harm has hitherto come of it."

"And about that child, Anna?" said the rector, fixing his eyes full upon her. "There is an odd Excuse me, if I appear inquisitive; but are you acquainted with his parentage?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Leycester, calmly meeting his gaze. "I know all about him."

Neither spoke again for a minute or two.

"There is no calculating the extent of a woman's indulgence," said the gentleman at length. "You must take care lest this unbounded attachment become a snare to you."

"You know what De Lamartine says," answered Anna; "*'Trop aimer est bien rarement un mal devant Dieu. Il n'y a pas de vase assez plein quand il n'en tombe pas quelques gouttes à terre.'*"

"I don't care a straw for any Frenchman's opinion on such a subject," cried Mr. Wentworth rather testily. "They have a knack of saying things neatly, but their doctrines are very unsound. Beware of setting up an earthly paradise with a mortal for its presiding genius. I find you, a woman professing godliness, living in a style of luxurious ease very far removed from the simplicity of the gospel. There

is danger that your heart may become entangled in these things. Recollect the young ruler."

"The same sacrifice is not exacted from every one," said Mrs. Leycester, thoughtfully. "There were many other rich men among the early disciples of Christ, to whom no such command was addressed. Need we forestal His decrees? Might He not say to a volunteer, 'Who hath required this at your hands?'"

"I can't imagine any instance in which such devotion could be regarded as officious," said Mr. Wentworth.

It suddenly occurred to him, however, that on more than one occasion our Lord had declined the offers of enthusiastic converts to leave all and follow Him, either discerning their hollowness, or preferring to utilize their services in another method. Abandoning that ground, therefore, Mr. Wentworth continued:

"You will at least not deny that we ought all to be prepared for whatever degree of self-renunciation may be laid upon us; and a course of carnal indulgence cannot be good training for the sterner virtues. Suppose the injunction we were speaking of addressed to you

or to yonder elegant neophyte, what think you, candidly now, would be the result?"

They had come in sight of the gates, where Hyacinth, Jasmine, and Ben Mio were awaiting their arrival. Mrs. Leycester's eye rested fondly on her husband, who, mindful always of the small charities of life, was standing, hat in hand, within the threshold of the lodge, talking to the gate-keeper's old mother.

"'As thy day, so shall thy strength be,'" murmured she. "Heaven forbid that I should boast on his behalf or my own; but I humbly believe that when God requires great sacrifices, He gives the grace to perform them."

Here the conversation stopped, while parting compliments were exchanged between Mr. Leycester and his guest. When the gates had closed behind them, and the carriage was bowling swiftly along the high road, Anna resumed the thread of their discourse.

"I cannot let you go, Mr. Wentworth, without thanking you for your friendly exhortation. I must, however, say a few words as to the apparent extravagance of our mode of living. I will pass over the benefits which a judicious liberality may confer upon hundreds who, in

these highly civilized days, gain their subsistence by producing tasteful superfluities for the rich; though many are of opinion that money so spent enriches the recipient more than that actually given in charity. But besides the general good, I have a purely personal argument to consider, namely, how my husband may be affected by the style of life I adopt. With a man of his stamp much mischief might be done by indiscriminating zeal. He derives pain or pleasure from a hundred trifles, which to hardier organizations are matters of indifference. Now, if, on his mind awakening to the importance of sacred things, I had striven to enforce a very austere rule of life, had taken all the colouring out of his existence, and forbidden him every kind of amusement and trivial occupation, as unworthy the Christian profession, should I not have disgusted him with a service entailing such distasteful obligations, and driven him away from the sanctuary he was half disposed to enter? Human nature, after all, is acted upon by the minutest springs; if he found me ill-dressed, his table worse appointed, his home less cheerful, his *menus-plaisirs* more limited than those of his equals in station, and all this in the name of religion, he would most

likely sink first into discontent and repining, and finally, after fretting away his natural good-humour, rush back into the wildest dissipation, in search of the excitement which is a necessity to persons constituted like himself. I do not overlook the claims of the poor; there are few, I trust, within our reach who can say their wants are neglected; but after all, Hyacinth is more precious to me than the whole world besides; and on no consideration, short of a distinct command from Heaven, would I venture to cast a stumbling-block in his way, or abridge one of the silken cords by which Providence draws some minds to the Source of all beauty and enjoyment."

Mr. Wentworth's breath was fairly taken away by this harangue. Such a system of making "friends of the mammon of unrighteousness" had never occurred to him before. He had no time to examine or combat the notion. The train rushed into the station as they drove up. The rector and his carpet bag were thrust into a vacant place: and in less than five minutes, the retreating clamour died away in the distance.

in their quarters, when Sir Philip Lawrance announced his arrival at Tunbridge Wells, and his intention to run over some day to lunch, if agreeable. Leycester responded by offering him dinner and a bed, which he accepted, "for one night," and occupied for a week. The attraction to him was visible enough; Azalea's fair and soft beauty had made an impression on him not to be effaced

There were no reasons, pecuniary or personal, for discouraging his attentions. From the girl's point of view, he was in the prime of life, well-looking, *distingué*, and very devoted; from that of her guardians, he was independent, and possessed of a handsome fortune. Hyacinth vouched that he was right-minded, and belonged to a good set,—the goodness, however, referring to style and connexions rather than to moral attributes. Anna liked him because he was Hyacinth's sworn friend and admirer. He encountered, therefore, few obstacles to his courtship. Fortunately, he was not one of those perverse individuals to whom the stimulus of opposition is necessary. On the contrary, it would rather have hurt his *amour-propre* to suppose that any family could hesitate to admit his alliance, or

any lady require much pressing to become his wife.

Veronica's beautiful face alone was clouded as she watched the progress of his suit; not that she disapproved of the pretender to her sister's hand, but the sight of the lovers reminded her how lately she herself had been the object of similar assiduities. What vows of undying love and unalterable fidelity had been poured into her ears! How eagerly had she been pursued, how dearly prized when won! Etheredge had been ready for her sake to forego the ambitious projects his friends would have had him entertain; neither wealth, nor influential connexion had been suffered for a moment to incline the balance against her charms. No woman surely ever seemed more secure of her husband's undivided heart! Yet, where now was the ardour that had triumphed over every obstacle? the affection that was to be her stay through life? Alas! the fierce flame had already burnt itself out; and little hope had she of rekindling an extinct passion. Through no fault of her own had this disappointment befallen her; neither was it so much Etheredge's fault as his misfortune, that he was incapable of the loftiest kind of attach-

ment. Mrs. Leycester, with all her experience, knew not what consolation to proffer for a grief so poignant.

"Poor Azalea!" Lady Etheredge would sigh; must she go through that dreadful disenchanting process, and lay her whole heart at the feet of a man who will trample on it, or at least push it aside? Ah! if girls only knew how soon marriage cools the most ardent adorer, few would be anxious to try the EXPERIMENT."

"All wives, we may hope, are not equally unfortunate," Mrs. Leycester ventured to suggest.

"That is true," said Veronica, sighing again. "How I envy you the terms on which you live with my brother! That entire community of interests must be so delightful! When I see how constantly you are in his thoughts, how he comes to you with all his joys and troubles, I am ready to cry at the contrast with my own lot. Etheredge is not unkind, far less brutal; so, you will say, things might have been worse. He is glad I should amuse myself, and is liberal about money when he has it; but beyond that kind of careless good-will, I do not believe he cares a straw for me, or the children either. I am shut out from all concern in his affairs, whether of business

or pleasure. He will go away for weeks and months together, racing, yachting, hunting, what not? and never write a line to ask if we are alive or dead, or to assure us of his own existence. When he is at home, he is either so wrapt up in his own pursuits as to have no time to waste upon us, or he lounges yawning about the house, looking very much bored and out of his element. Yet he seems astonished if I complain of his neglect. I declare," continued Veronica, with rising emotion, "when I reflect that I am but four-and-twenty, and shall perhaps have to pass thirty, forty, fifty years of such a loveless life as mine is, there are moments when I am tempted—"

She paused abruptly.

"Take refuge in your nursery, dearest, when such thoughts come across you," said Anna, in a soothing tone, "and seek there a solace for the desolate future that affrights you. After all, it may prove less dreary than you anticipate. Men alter so much in the course of a few years! Your husband's heart may yet return to you; and in any case, you would be none the happier for losing your self-respect."

"Perhaps not," replied Veronica; "but as to

the hope you hold out, I see no prospect of its realization. A quarrel may be made up, a misunderstanding cleared away; I can imagine, also, that the moderate amount of liking with which many people come together, may ripen into strong attachment. You may strike fire from the hostile clash of flint and steel, and rub two dry sticks into a flame; but who can revive dead ashes? or produce a cheerful warmth in an empty grate?"

"Surely you take too desponding a view of your position! I would fain believe that, with the natural tendency of sorrow, you both exaggerate Lord Etheredge's deficiencies, and under-rate your influence over him. Look at my case, which you think so enviable. Do you suppose that my married life has been one of unbroken felicity? You must see that I started with an all but insurmountable disadvantage. A woman of mature age, without beauty or shining talents, wedded to a very young man, whose rare endowments made him the darling of every circle he entered, what could be more unpromising? We had our troubles: indeed the breach between us went far beyond apathy and discontent. For twelve whole months we dwelt apart, and many

might have thought the rupture irremediable; yet, you see, we have outlived even the remembrance of our wrongs."

Lady Etheridge was interested, but not entirely re-assured by her sister-in-law's example.

"All that sounds very encouraging," she observed; "but then look what a nature you had to deal with! Cinthy might be wild and unthinking, but he was never heartless; and his caressing ways would upset the sternest resolution a woman could form against him."

"Oh! I freely admit that Hyacinth is one of a thousand; and that it required a singular assemblage of circumstances to bring about the fortunate result you witness. Had he not met with a check in the career he had entered, had an accident not conducted me to his side, we might have drifted farther and farther apart, till the gulf between us was too wide for reconciliation, and our solitary lives closed in misery, if not in sin! Whence I would have you, my dear girl, infer both the danger of letting matters grow to that pitch; and the little need you have to despair at present. If my husband is a *nature d'élite*, and, being once reconciled to the conjugal yoke, carries it with rare grace and cordiality, on the

other hand, your advantages as a wife and mother are far greater than I possessed. Why, then, should you fail where I succeeded?"

Veronica did not wrap herself sullenly in her grief, refusing all comfort and counsel. Mrs. Leycester encouraged her to open her mind, knowing how the young magnify their sorrows to themselves; but she was sparing of verbal consolation, trusting to create a salutary diversion by interesting her in her children, who were now growing beyond mere babyhood. Veronica had hitherto regarded them much as she had done her dolls a few years before; they were pretty toys, brought down to her, in lace and blue ribbons, when she was in the humour to play with them, and consigned to the care of others as soon as she had had enough of their company. She was quite surprised at first at the fund of occupation and amusement her brother derived from his son, at the readiness with which he entered into the child's feelings, and bent his mind to the same level. By degrees she began to share his pleasure, and to comprehend how much of Hyacinth's moral improvement was due to the healthy contact of a soul so fresh from its Maker. The fever of her own spirit might, she

felt, be allayed in a similar manner. If she could emulate his skill in winning the confidence and fixing the attention of infancy, how many hours of *ennui* and depression might she not escape! how many temptations would she not shun!

The undertaking proved, on trial, to be much easier than she anticipated. For gaining hearts, indeed, of any age, there is no magic like an honest desire to succeed; and children, like some other animals, have an instinctive perception of the kind of sentiment they inspire. A dog never thrusts his nose into a hand likely to repel that mute petition for notice, nor will a child be won, by any show of fondness, to pour his half-articulate babble into a cold or listless ear. Hyacinth did, no doubt, exercise some occult influence over every sentient being that approached him; but part, at least, of his popularity was traceable to a strong desire to please, rendering him singularly observant of the means to be adopted to that end; and thus far his success might be attained by any one willing to devote their faculties to the same object.

Besides furnishing Veronica with wholesome distraction for her thoughts, Mrs. Leycester

strove to fortify her against the fits of gloomy dejection by which she was from time to time attacked. This was the most difficult part of the task; for it is much easier to condole with an afflicted person, and even to alleviate for a moment the pressure of his cross, than to teach him how to carry it aright. The attempt is apt to be resented; and unless made both skilfully and tenderly, may only aggravate the evil. It would have been useless, for instance, in Veronica's circumstances, to moralize upon the dangers of a hasty marriage, or treat her yearning after some community of feeling as mere girlish romance. Nor was it sufficient simply to preach resignation; she must not be suffered to sink into a victim, yielding passively to a fate which a little energy and perseverance might have averted. Still less desirable was it that her sense of wrong should take an active shape, and darken her soul with hatred, or stain it with crime.

"What you have to do, my dear girl," Anna would say to her, "is to look your position boldly in the face, and accustom yourself to the sight of it. There is nothing to be gained by shutting our eyes to the truth; nor on the other

hand, will fretting and chafing alter inexorable facts. Lord Etheredge, we will admit, is not the man you took him for; not, at any rate, the man you now would choose. But he is your husband, the father of your children; you cannot disown him, or exchange him, or get rid of him in any way; your only plan, then, is to make the best of him."

"Granted," Veronica would reply, "but how?"

"In the first place, don't expect too much from him. You have discovered what his deficiencies are; you know that with the best will in the world, a man cannot alter his whole nature, and acquire sensibility or refinement of feeling, any more than he can give himself an ear for music: do not, therefore, regard these involuntary failings as an affront. On the other hand, don't take refuge in contemptuous indifference, and harden your heart against a husband who does not seem to prize it at its true value. Between demanding of an ordinary character the depth or the warmth of one more finely organised, and despising it as utterly trivial and worthless, there is a medium, which you will discover if you honestly search for it. Lord Etheredge

must have his good points, dwell chiefly on these, when you think or speak of him: his moments of expansion; beware how you chill him then by coldness or asperity:—a side by which his inner self is accessible; and this it is your grand business to learn. *Quand on n'a pas ce qu'on aime, il faut aimer ce qu'on a!* For one husband or wife irreclaimably vicious or disagreeable, there are probably fifty couples that might live at least in decent peace and comfort, if either party had the wit to take the measure of the other, and the charity to make due allowance for human imperfection. Set to work bravely, my dear Veronica, to construct your own happiness out of the materials under your hand, without stopping to grumble at their paucity, or to complain that it has not been provided for you ready-made."

There might be nothing very original in Mrs. Leycester's matronly counsels; yet many of the ideas so suggested were perfectly new to Lady Etheredge, who, like numberless other girls, had heard a great deal about the process of "getting married," but had never once been invited to consider what was to come after that exciting event, how each day of remaining life was to be got through. On that point turns a host of

misconceptions: lovers are apt to look at existence in the gross; they talk with vague rapture of the years of felicity before them, without having one definite notion as to the way in which the weeks and months may be expected to flow on. How many "happy couples" are bored to death by the end of the honey-moon!

It will be said that a young creature who has never been called on to decide any more important question than what dress she should wear, is not competent to lay out a scheme of life for herself: that with the very slight knowledge of the world and of human nature she has had time to acquire, it is impossible she should contrive at once to accommodate herself to a husband's humours, or possess the art to deal with a jealous, a despotic, a negligent, a profligate, a capricious master. Doubtless it is so; but then one cannot help asking, is she fit to marry? No blame attaches to a midshipman because he does not understand all the mysteries of navigation, or suspect the hidden perils of the deep; but do we trust him with the care of a vessel? and are the happiness and credit of a married woman's whole life, (involving those of two families, besides reacting upon her posterity), of less account than a sloop and her crew?

CHAPTER XVI.

* * * * *

 "I am not well :
 So please you leave me."

CYMBELINE.

ANNA had the satisfaction of thinking that Lady Etheredge went away somewhat cheered and enlightened, with a sincere intention of trying the remedies suggested for her case. Lord Etheredge came to Hildhurst to fetch her; he was in high good humour, and made himself so agreeable during the few days he remained, that Mrs. Leycester was tempted at first to think his wife rather unreasonable in her requirements. Surely this frank, lively, well-bred young man, with his fine figure and indomitable hardihood, was not a mean prize in the lottery of marriage!

A little observation, however, convinced Anna that his Lordship exactly answered Balzac's des-

cription of "*un de ces hommes que le ciel a créés pour prendre et digérer quatre repas par jour, dormir, aimer la première venue, et se battre,*" failing which last occupation, he expended his courage and activity in every kind of athletic pastime. His bearing was thoroughly gentleman-like; his reputation unassailable; his wife had never to blush for him, and this was no small advantage. But the aristocratic head he carried so well was all but empty; his gaiety was "*sans esprit, une gaieté de caserne*;" intellectual resources he had none; and so far from possessing the "*delicatesse de cœur qui rend un homme esclave du bonheur d'une femme,*" he could not even appreciate the sacrifices of that sort made for him. A common-place spouse might have been perfectly contented with him: Veronica was, and could not but feel she was, thrown away.

The young peer tried to persuade his host to join in some sporting expedition set on foot by one or two of their mutual friends; and finding Hyacinth disinclined, rallied him on his domesticity.

"You are quite a model husband, Cinthy, my boy! Cupid with his wings clipped, and his

quiver laid by in Venus's wardrobe! Do you never venture out of bounds now? never quit Madame's side?"

Hyacinth was not roused to any assertion of independence; the question only set him pondering how it was he had no desire to stray.

"The plain fact, I suppose, is this," he said at length: "Mrs. Leycester makes such a pet of me at home that I am never half comfortable anywhere else. Over-indulgence has been the ruin of me, my dear fellow! I have not a trace of proper manly spirit left. *Au reste*, you know I never was much addicted to men's parties."

"We may pick up some attractions of the other sex. Your friend Mrs. Agnew, and her handsome sister, are staying at Leamington; and for that matter, women are plentiful enough every where, thank Heaven! Come, Cinthy, you must break your tether for once."

Leycester did not immediately reply; Etheredge thought he was wavering, but his eye was following Jasmine's abortive efforts to get astride of Ben Mio.

"Why do you wish it?" he said suddenly, reverting to the conversation, and confronting his brother-in-law.

"Oh! because I should like your company, for one thing, and also," added the plain-spoken nobleman, "because if you go on living shut up in this way, people will say you are tied to your wife's apron-strings."

"Which means, that Dacre does say so."

"How could you know? What put Dacre into your head? I never mentioned him. You are not angry?"

"Angry! I wish him no worse than such a tie as binds me. I've a good mind, though, to accept your, or his, proposal, just to show . . . pshaw! why should I give myself trouble, and an amiable woman pain, to avert his sneer? or rather to change the character of it. He may as well think me afraid of my wife, as afraid of him."

Lord and Lady Etheredge took their leave the next day, accompanied by Miss Leycester, and followed by Sir Philip Lawrance, who no longer needed excuses for lingering in her vicinity. He had made a formal tender of his hand, which had been accepted on the nominal condition of Mrs. Desart's assent. The friends whose opinion might really have swayed Azalea, were unanimous in their approval: Sir

Philip had no one's consent to ask. Veronica half forgot her own troubles in the dear delight to which no female mind is wholly insensible, of arranging and speculating upon another person's wedding; while Camellia, who came to spend the rest of her holidays with them, exalted in her prospects as bridesmaid, perhaps carrying her imagination a step or two farther still.

Hyacinth had fancied his wife looking pale in the morning; when their guests had departed, she dropped upon a seat with a jaded air, scarcely to be accounted for by any exertion she had undergone.

"What makes me so lazy to-day, I cannot imagine," she said; "but I certainly shall be glad to sit by the fire this evening, without having to talk and amuse other people."

Hyacinth glanced rather uneasily at her then, and once or twice afterwards; but she laughed off the idea of indisposition, declaring she should go to bed early, and have a good rest, which would set her up again. When she rose, however, the next morning, her face, neck, and arms were covered with red spots; seeing which, she got into bed again, and sent for the doctor.

Then, calling her maid, she charged her not to alarm Mr. Leycester by her way of communicating the fact.

"Don't rush at him with the news, but when he asks for me, just say I am not very well, and have asked Mr. Baldwin to look in upon me. But whatever you do, Ford, don't let your master come near me. Tell him I am asleep, or have a headache, anything you please, in short; I will take upon my conscience any fib you may utter, provided you keep him out of this room till after the doctor has paid his visit."

"I'll do my best, Ma'am; but it isn't easy to say no to Master."

Anna could not help smiling, though her mind was oppressed by a terrible fear. Mr. Baldwin arrived before any contest had arisen upon the question; Hyacinth was warned of his coming just soon enough to prevent an awkward surprise, and had no time to insist upon his right of entry to the forbidden chamber. Indeed, he was so little disturbed at the aspect of things, as presented to him, that he went on composedly with his breakfast while the doctor was looking, listening, feeling above. He put many questions, and after each reply, beat down

again and examined the spots. Mrs. Leycester waited for him to pronounce an opinion, but finding he maintained silence upon the nature of the disease, and merely spoke of the treatment to be applied, she was obliged to ask him what he supposed to be the matter.

"Very difficult to say," was the ambiguous answer. "This kind of rash may be thrown out from a variety of causes."

"Does it look at all like the small-pox?" enquired Anna, trying to disguise her anxiety under an indifferent tone.

She fancied that Mr. Baldwin avoided her eye, as he rejoined: "Have you been in the way of it?"

"They have it in the village, I understand; and I was there the day before yesterday, though not in an infected house."

He uncovered her arm, and examined it again attentively. "It is just possible," he then said: "to-morrow will show. Meanwhile, you will remain in bed, and keep yourself warm and tranquil. Let in a little fresh air from time to time, but not too much light."

He drew down the blind which had been raised at his entrance; then returned to the

bedside to say: "Don't give way to despondency, my dear madam. It is by no means clear at present that you have caught this alarming disorder; and should it be so, you will probably have it very lightly. The cases I have already seen in the neighbourhood are of an extremely mild type. By God's blessing, we will bring you safe through it, without even those disfiguring traces which ladies often dread as much as death itself."

"Oh! that is not what troubles me, though I admit it would distress me sorely to be rendered a hideous object; but—Mr. Leycester must not remain in the house another hour. Will you convey to him my earnest desire that he and the child should leave it immediately, adding such strong representations from yourself as may induce him the more readily to comply? For there would be danger to him, would there not?"

"There would be risk, certainly. If—which is not yet proved—you took the infection by passing through a street where sick people lay, *a fortiori* he may imbibe it under the same roof with a patient; but I myself have little faith in

the doctrine of contagion, except where there are predisposing causes."

"That is Mr. Leycester's case; he has, at least, a great horror of the small-pox; and fear, I believe, is a most powerful agent in the propagation of disease. I would not have him exposed to such a hazard for all the world; it would make me wretched to know that he was incurring it."

She was growing quite excited; Mr. Baldwin pacified her by promising to second her wishes, and descended to the breakfast-room, where Mr. Leycester awaited his coming.

"What news, doctor?" said Hyacinth, coming eagerly forward. "I trust there is nothing seriously amiss with your patient?"

"It is a case of suspicion at present," answered Mr. Baldwin; "but it will be wise to act as if our worst fears were realized. Mrs. Leycester is very desirous you should place yourself, without delay, beyond the risk of infection."

"Good Heavens!" cried Hyacinth, "what, then, do you apprehend? Fever? Cholera? Sma . . ." He stopped short.

"Remember, I give it only as a conjecture,"

the doctor hastened to say, "but the symptoms certainly do bear a resemblance to those of small-pox."

The bright carnation faded out of Leycester's face; he sat as if stunned by the sound of the word he had left unspoken.

"You perceive, then, the necessity for precaution," continued Mr. Baldwin. "Uncertain as the case now is, it would be foolish to wait until full assurance is obtained by the spreading of the mischief. Your presence here can be of no benefit to the sick lady, since you must not approach her; while it would seriously aggravate our troubles if you or the child were to take the disorder."

"Ah! true—the child!" ejaculated Hyacinth, glancing towards the window, whence Jasmine might be seen trundling his hoop along the terrace. "He must be sent out of harm's way immediately. I will consider what arrangement to make for him."

"A couple of hours would carry you both to the coast," suggested the doctor, "and there is nothing like the sea-breeze for sweeping away the taint of disease. I recommend you to set out forthwith."

"You recommend *me*?" said Leycester, turning towards him with an air of mild reproach. "Recommend a husband to desert his suffering wife on the mere chance that her malady may be catching? It is plain you are a bachelor, Mr. Baldwin."

"My dear sir, I only obey the injunctions of the lady herself, who is much more uneasy on your account than on her own. It is she who implores you, through my mouth, to provide for your own safety."

"That is her commission, is it?" said Hyacinth, all his colour coming back in a sudden flush. "A pretty opinion she must have of me! Selfish enough I am, beyond doubt, but not quite such a contemptible fellow as she seems to suppose."

"I don't think contempt was the dominant feeling in Mrs. Leycester's mind," observed the doctor, rather taken aback by this explosion. "Sentiment apart, you are of no use here; and if, as I understand, you have a special horror of the small pox, you will be peculiarly liable to take it; always supposing that to be Mrs. Leycester's malady, which I am far from asserting at present."

"Very clearly and cautiously put," answered Hyacinth; "but you see, my dear sir, the sentiment, as you call it, is precisely what one cannot set aside in affairs of this nature. You might have told one of our noble army in the trenches before Sebastopol, that his presence there was of no particular use, while if the enemy let fly, he would be the first victim; would he, think you, have branded himself with cowardice by effecting a timely retreat, or remained to stand his chance of death or disfigurement?"

Mr. Baldwin shrugged his shoulders, and went about his business. Hyacinth smoked a cigar on the terrace by way of recomposing his nerves, and then mounted the stairs with the design of paying a visit to the invalid. He was met, however, on the landing by the faithful Ford, who barred his further progress. An animated contest ensued, in which he complained, as bitterly as a minister in a minority, of the "conspiracy" against him, and vehemently insisted upon his right to commit any imprudence he pleased, but finally yielded to the force of female eloquence, the prevailing argument being that his entry into the disputed territory would have the most

prejudicial effect upon the patient, whom it was of great importance to keep quiet.

"My mistress is terribly disturbed about you already, sir; she wishes you away entirely, but if she was to see you in her room, she would go clean out of her mind, I do believe; so pray be advised, sir, and humour her fancy for a day at any rate."

After such an appeal as this, Leycester could not persist without appearing bent upon having his own way, rather than regardful of his wife's feelings. He reluctantly abandoned the field, and walked off to the Vicarage to solicit a night's shelter under its roof for Jasmine.

"I don't wish to send him further," he said, "till we see whether this alarm is well founded. As he has not been near the sick room, I think there can be no danger of his communicating any virus to your children; but if you feel the slightest misgiving, don't hesitate to deny my request."

The Vicar did not conceive it necessary to carry precaution so far; so the boy was despatched with his nurse, to spend the day with his play-fellows at the parsonage.

His father, thus left with no companion but Ben Mio, had a dismal time of it. The afternoon proving very wet, he was compelled to stay indoors, and had no chance of escaping for a moment from the thoughts that haunted his solitude. Between concern for his wife, who might be in imminent peril, and apprehension for himself, none the less poignant for being suppressed, his wonted equanimity was completely upset. Since Anna and he had come together again, he had never been so thoroughly wretched, not even during those first weeks, when his physical sufferings had been most acute. The possibility of losing that devoted consort by whom he had been cherished with the tenderest care, *abreuvé d'amour*, during many years, had never entered into his calculations. What a blank would his life be without her! It seemed to him he had never appreciated her full worth till now.

He esteemed it fortunate that he had declined to leave home at that moment. She would not, perhaps, have let him know of her illness, and he might have been frolicking about the country while she was on a sick bed, with none but hired watchers about it. True, if denied access he could do little for her, but it must be some sup-

port to her, as it was a relief to him, to know he was at hand in case of need. To flee at the first hint of danger would have been a dastardly proceeding; he would not purchase at such a price exemption from the calamity he most dreaded—a calamity the bare thought of which made him shudder. For he was not above confessing the value he set upon personal attractions; and if he could not contemplate without dismay the idea of Anna's pleasing countenance, marred by the traces of disease, much less could he reconcile himself to the possibility of presenting an odious spectacle to others.

Unable to settle to any occupation, he wandered restlessly about the house, pausing often in the vicinity of his wife's apartment, from which position he was generally routed by the watchful Ford, who further insisted on shifting his quarters for the night to the other end of the building, and manifested a strong inclination to lock him up in the same, but contented herself with receiving his parole to abstain from nocturnal rambles.

Mrs. Leycester's day was not much more cheerful. Her own death appeared the least painful contingency that might happen. It

would cost her a pang of course, to quit a world where, at present, all was bright around her; but it had been her constant prayer that she might not live so long as to be a burden upon her youthful spouse, or entirely to survive his lately conceived attachment to her. The idea of recovering only to inspire him with disgust and abhorrence, was one that sorely tried her faith and patience; she shrank away from it as Cain from his sentence, with the cry, "This is more than I can bear."

But what if he were smitten by the same fell stroke, and either sank under it, or rose a blurred and distorted image of his former self! She should not love him the less; but would her adhesion console him for the loss of the admiration he so dearly prized, and render the handsomest man of his day contented to be ugly?

Ford just then entering the room, was assailed with eager questions touching Mr. Leicester's movements. She reported his departure with the child for the Vicarage, and thinking it highly desirable to ease her mistress's mind on that score, allowed her to suppose that there he intended to remain until the nature of her malady were clearly ascertained. Anna heaved a

sigh of relief at his comparative safety, followed by a pang of natural grief, as the thought occurred to her :

“Suppose I should never see him again! Would he let me die without a farewell word? Yet what folly to neutralize all our previous care, for the gratification of an idle longing! We shall meet one day, with no fears to cloud our greeting. Ford, bring me the miniature that lies on the drawing-room table.”

“Lor’, ma’am! it ain’t half good-looking enough for master,” observed the maid, as she returned with one of Claudet’s best performances. “The hair is wonderful like, to be sure; and I declare there’s the very button that master would sew on himself one day, and sewed all askew! But the lips are too thick, and they’ve made him as dark as my brother, who has been sixteen years in India.”

Amused with this toy, Anna lay for a little while in peace. As the day wore on, indeed, her agitation gradually subsided; she grew drowsy, and only roused herself at intervals, sufficiently to take the medicine or nourishment presented to her, sinking back almost immediately into a lethargic state. So she continued the whole of

the next day, when the doctor, whose coming was eagerly looked for, pronounced that her complaint was not small-pox, though, as he could not exactly say what it was, he recommended that the precautions hitherto adopted should not yet be laid aside.

Relieved of his heaviest anxiety, Hyacinth bore this second day's separation better than the first. He ventured to bring the child home, and solaced himself by inditing his wife a letter, which she was almost too sleepy to read. On the morrow she brightened up a little, and as the spots were evidently dying away, Mr. Baldwin no longer opposed her husband's admission. Great was the delight of the one, deep the joy of the other, at their re-union. Anna thought it well worth being ill, to receive such marks of tender solicitude. Thenceforth Hyacinth was scarcely to be got out of her room. He read to her, waited upon her, and more than once evinced his fitness for the office of nurse, by falling sound asleep at her bedside.

Few men would have been so welcome in a sick chamber; he brought in with him a sensation of freshness and vigorous life; made himself at home there at once, instead of fidgetting to

and fro, looking as if he were fulfilling a task; and showed rare sagacity in knowing when to talk, and what to talk about; adapting himself to his new position, with his usual facility. In nothing that he ever undertook, did the possibility of failure cross his mind; self-distrust, with its concomitants, awkwardness and hesitation, was to him a thing unknown; hence, he was perfectly easy and natural, in full possession of his wits, and ready for any emergency.

When Anna was well enough to leave her apartment, he boldly volunteered to carry her down stairs, but with all her faith in his invincible success, she declined putting his muscles to the test.

CHAPTER XVII.

"And now in this new field, with some applause,
He clear'd hedge, ditch, and double post and rail.
And never *craned*, and made but few *faux pas*,
And only fretted when the scent 'gan fail.

• • • • •

He also had a quality uncommon,
To early risers after a long chase,
A quality agreeable to woman,
When her soft liquid words run on apace,
Who likes a listener, whether saint or sinner,—
He did not fall asleep just after dinner."

DON JUAN.

A VERY pleasant time was that which immediately followed Mrs. Leycester's recovery. Besides the delightful sense of returning health, and the charm of those few bright, genial days, which sometimes give us in February a foretaste of the coming spring, there was joy unspeakable for her in the discovery of the hold she possessed over her husband's affections. If she had been tempted at any time to believe that her importance in his eyes depended solely upon the

zeal and tact with which she ministered to his comfort, his conduct at this season convinced her that his regard was of a more disinterested nature. The unremitting attentions he paid her during her convalescence, the ingenuity with which he anticipated her wishes, and the unfeigned pleasure he took in their gratification, bore witness for him that it was no mere selfish impulse which dictated his care of her.

Ford had described to her his abortive efforts to penetrate to her couch, and his positive refusal to seek safety in flight. When she affected to reprove him for this rashness, he alleged the example of her servants, who, with the quiet fidelity which is honourably characteristic of the class, had one and all continued to execute their various functions.

"Your maid never blenched," said he, "yet she was in far greater danger than I, with less motive for braving it; would you have had your husband surpassed in nerve and devotion to you by a maid servant? I think Providence would have repaid my cowardice by sending upon me the very plague from which I fled."

With that, he relapsed into the *Times*, whence he presently read aloud the arrival of the West

India mail steamer, Tartarus, having on board among other passengers, Captain Maynard, lady, and child, from Bermuda.

"You must write and ask them here," continued he. "I know you take pleasure in Mrs. Maynard's society."

"Which is more, I fear, than you do," observed Anna.

Hyacinth's countenance expressed a modified assent. "She is not exactly in my *genre*," said he; "but as your friend, she shall be welcome. Of her worthy spouse, I have but a faint impression: a good little fellow, as far as I recollect, well-looking, neat, and common-place."

His eye was still travelling over the printed page. Something he saw there suddenly arrested his attention. Anna noticed the start he gave, and the eager way in which he bent over the paper; as he did not announce any remarkable intelligence, but sat silent for some time reading, or appearing to read, she concluded he had met with an interesting article, and forbore to interrupt him. By and bye Jasmine came in, and, with less respect for a studious disposition, made straight for his father's knee. Hyacinth gazed, she thought,

somewhat sadly into his rosy face, and was less ready than usual with his replies. After a little while, he kissed the child very tenderly, set him down, and quitted the room.

Mrs. Leycester took up the newspaper, and sought out the column headed "West Indies," to peruse the list of passengers by the *Tartarus*; then glancing through the summary of news brought by the steamer from various ports, she lighted upon the following paragraph:

"Patrons of the ballet will learn with regret the premature decease of the fascinating *danseuse*, Rita Frascani, who was for one or two seasons the chief attraction at Her Majesty's Theatre. This charming artiste was fulfilling an engagement at Mexico, when she was seized with cholera, and died in a few hours."

This it was, then, which had cast a shadow upon her husband's brow: the mother of his child was dead, in her prime of youth and beauty;—"and I survive!" thought Anna. "Does it strike him, I wonder, how unevenly the balances of life and death are held?" But she did not esteem him the less for showing some emotion at the demise of one who had been dear to him; nor did she fear that the

heart which was soft enough to ache for a lost love, would prove insensible to the claims of the living wife.

All that day he was very subdued and serious; memory was busy among the scenes of his unbridled youth. He could not pour his remembrances or his regrets into Anna's ears; yet he instinctively drew nearer to her for comfort. She felt this, when in the early twilight he seated himself, as he was fond of doing, at her feet, and laid his head upon her knees; and there was more than common tenderness in the caresses she lavished on him, soothing by mute sympathy a grief that could not well be put into words. Only when Jasmine had bid them good night, she ventured to whisper, "I will be a mother to him, Cinthy, as long as I live;" upon which the young man kissed her hand reverently, murmuring, "Long may you be spared, my Anna, for his sake and mine."

He was further gratified to perceive that, without a word being said on the subject, the lad's coloured dresses were laid aside for a time, and black ones substituted: it was an arrangement he would not have dreamt of suggesting, but

Anna could scarcely have pleased him better than by this tacit recognition of the deceased.

The Maynards were not able to avail themselves at once of the invitation they received to Hildhurst. Mrs. Leycester had time to get quite strong again ere they arrived, when her blooming looks struck her niece with almost as much surprise as Hyacinth's complete recovery. Mary herself had rather improved in the interval; she had lost that girlish slimness which, after the first blush of youth is past, is apt to degenerate into angularity; her complexion was clearer; her face wore a softer expression. It was plain that her experience of matrimony had not been a painful one. She spoke with full content of her lot, though soberly, as became her character.

"One reason, perhaps," said she, "why I have been happier than many of my neighbours is, that I did not expect too much. I had previously been of small account in my home circle, and was delighted to feel my own importance as a wife, a mistress, and a mother. My husband is a kind, good soul; and I would not exchange

him for the profoundest scholar, the most brilliant cavalier in Europe."

"That is as it should be," said Anna, with a half smile. She suspected a fling at Hyacinth in the last words; but out of consideration for her guest, suppressed her opinion that the risks attendant upon eminence of any kind are preferable to the tame bliss which waits upon a safe mediocrity. "And how does the life suit you?" she continued. "An officer's wife is sometimes said to lead a not very enviable existence."

"A great deal depends upon the way you take things. I don't mind having to rough it occasionally, and am glad to see something of the world. It is tiresome, of course, to have to ask leave whenever you want to go anywhere, and there is sure to be a court martial or a review when you have planned an expedition; but such accidents will happen in other professions."

"Yes; a doctor's, for instance, who is never sure of his leisure for a moment, either by day or by night."

"A medical man, however, has the consolation of knowing that the interruptions which beset him are mostly caused by stern necessity, and will all bring grist to his mill. Now with an

officer, the provoking part of the business is, that nine times out of ten the duties which claim him are of the veriest routine description. It is no wonder to me, since I have been initiated into the mysteries of barrack-life, that most young officers are so ill-informed and unintellectual. Their day is broken up into fragments, too small for any but a skilful economist of time to profit by; and their minds are so perpetually fixed upon trifling details, that they lose the power of applying them to a wider range of thought."

Had this speech been uttered in Leycester's hearing, he would perhaps have laid to the charge of our military system certain mental deficiencies exhibited by Captain Maynard, who appeared to the versatile Hyacinth singularly *borné* and unimpressible. As a man of the loftiest fashion, he was, of course, superior to enthusiasm himself, and blamed no one for the want of it; but he found it uphill work to make conversation for a guest possessing, apparently, no tastes whatsoever. In most of the small-talk with which he would have regaled men of his own set—the Opera, the next Derby, the reigning beauties, the last club-gossip—Arthur, long

absent from England, could take no part; on military matters he was dumb, for fear of seeming professional; he had little to say of his foreign experiences, still less on any abstract theme, the fine arts, politics, science—flights, indeed, in which Hyacinth would have been troubled to follow him. A cigar is at once a bond of fellowship, and an excuse for taciturnity: Leycester produced his choicest store; Maynard did not smoke. He was no card-player, and but a poor hand at billiards; out-door amusements had few charms for him.

There remained the stable, and here luckily the two gentlemen discovered some common ground. Arthur, like every true Briton, was fond of horses, and understood something about them; though he erred in supposing himself a greater adept than his host, who sauntered about *more suo* among his beautiful stud, patting their glossy coats, calling them endearing names, and treating one or two to a young carrot, as a lady might have done on a visit to those admirably kept premises.

“Much he knows about a horse, I warrant,” was Maynard’s rather hasty conclusion. “He

would not venture to lift one of their hoofs, for fear of soiling his fingers."

To show his own freedom from such weakness, the Captain handled all their legs, and examined their mouths, poking, punching, and criticising according to the prescribed formulary on such occasions.

"Which would you choose to ride?" asked Leicester. "We must have a canter this afternoon."

"What will you ride yourself, sir?" enquired the head groom, when Arthur had made his selection. "Rhadamanthus is nice and fresh; he has hardly been out this week past."

"Then you must exercise him yourself, Williams; I can't be pestered to-day with a frantic animal. Saddle the old mare for me."

Arthur stared at what he took for a confession of incapacity; riding being a rare luxury to him, he naturally liked to make the most of it, and the more spirited the steed, the greater excitement there was in mastering it.

"I have heard much talk of Leicester's horsemanship," said he to his wife, as they sat together in her room before the dinner bell rang;

"but I saw nothing superlative about it to-day. He sits in a lounging way, just as he walks, carries a loose rein, and seems to think it too much trouble to do more than canter across a field, or along the bits of turf by the roadside. We came to an enclosure with some hurdles in it, and, as the gate was open, I proposed to go in, and try our horses at them. 'If you please,' said he. So in I went, and leaped the hurdles two or three times, and—would you believe it?—there he sat outside, looking on all the time!"

"He was always indolent," observed Mrs. Maynard, "and perhaps since that dreadful accident, he may have grown a little timid on horseback."

Meanwhile Leycester was saying to his spouse: "That young man appears very fond of riding, and not a bad hand at it either. He would like a day's hunting, I dare say. What did I do with the card of the meets, do you remember?"

The card was found, and a day chosen. Maynard proposed to mount the steed he had already ridden.

"You had better have one of the hunters," remarked Hyacinth. "Tournament is a nice hack, and can clear an ordinary fence easy

enough; but he has no idea of water, and we may have a good many brooks to-morrow."

This looked like business, Arthur thought; and so did Mr. Leycester when he came down to an early breakfast the next morning, in his scarlet coat and top-boots. There were no fanciful extravagancies about his costume; all was strictly correct and in good keeping. Even Mary approved of his "get up" to-day. It gave him quite a manly aspect, she declared, turning half regretfully from his slim figure to her husband's, the outline of which was already diverging from its primitive purity. Arthur, in fact, was growing stout, and falling into the married man's practices of unbuttoning his waist-coat after dinner, and preferring slippers to any other form of *chaussure*.

Mrs. Leycester looked anxious; she said not a word expressive of uneasiness, but her glance rested wistfully upon her husband, as if she were loth to lose sight of him. Mary detected her stealing a kiss, a larceny which he supported with true Christian resignation, for he offered his assailant the other cheek also. The transaction had so pleasing an effect, that Mrs. Maynard was induced to imitate it.

"There! that'll do, my dear; good bye!" said the Captain, struggling under the unexpected salute.

Mary drew back disconcerted; to meet a pair of laughing lips in close proximity to her own, and hear the saucy whisper, "Give it to me, *notre nièce*; that stupid fellow does not know when he is well off." And before she had time to stand upon her dignity, a soft pressure was applied which gave her quite a new sensation.

The ladies spent a quiet day together; but they had too many interests in common for the time to hang heavy on their hands. Only as the hour drew on when the absentees might be expected home, Mrs. Leycester began to glance frequently at the clock, and listen for the sound of horses' feet. Once or twice Mary had to wait for an answer.

"I really beg your pardon, dear," said Anna, the third time this occurred; "but I fancied I heard the garden gate slam; they may have dismounted at the stables, and walked up the back-way." She ran to the hall door to look out, but there was no one to be seen.

"What is the use of exciting oneself?" asked

Mary, half impatiently. "They won't come a bit the sooner for all our fussing; and when they do come, our ears will furnish us with unmistakable evidence of the fact."

It was foolish, Anna confessed; and down she sat for ten minutes or so, till the distant bark of a dog caught her notice. "Here they are, at last!" cried she, and rushed out to greet the returning hunters, as they came clattering up to the steps, accompanied by Jasmine and Ben Mio. Mary, following more leisurely, found Mr. Leicester in the hall, his child clinging round his neck, his dog frisking about him, one hand clasped in his wife's, as if his absence had been of a month's duration.

"Come and have a glass of wine at once, to support you till dinner is ready. I am sure you both must need refreshment," said Mrs. Leicester, leading the way into the dining-room.

Hyacinth dropped wearily upon a chair, and Mary was just thinking how deadly pale he looked, when Anna, who, whatever she was doing, seemed always to have one eye upon him, snatched up a water-bottle, and sprang to his side. She sprinkled the pure fluid on his forehead, unwound the shawl from his neck, and

threw the window wide open. These measures were taken just in time; he did not entirely lose consciousness, and was able in a few minutes to sit up, and sip with a smile the sherry which she held to his lips. Neither he nor his wife exhibited any great discomposure at the attack, to which he was occasionally subject after unusual exertion, though to Mary, this sudden failure of physical power appeared alarming enough.

"Poor Mr. Lyeester is evidently delicate still," she remarked to her spouse, when both couples had paired off to their respective apartments. "Did he get a fall, or is it mere fatigue that has knocked him up so completely?"

"I don't know in the least what to make of that fellow!" exclaimed the captain, pausing in the act of drawing off his boot. "One day he potters lazily along, in the style of a gouty old gentleman taking his constitutional airing; the next, he rides like the very devil! He fall! Well, if his horse fell, I suppose he would go down with him; but as to his coming off, under any circumstances, he appears as little liable to such a mischance as a Centaur."

"I always heard he was a good rider," observed Mary; "but I did not credit him with

the energy, even if he possessed the nerve, to hunt."

"That was just my impression," returned Arthur, "and his *début* in the field rather confirmed it; for the very first barrier we came to, —a mere ditch,—his horse refused, and instead of forcing the beast up to it, he rode some distance round! 'I never quarrel with my horse, when the hounds are running,' quoth he; 'it would have taken me longer to contest the point than to cut round the other way; besides putting Rhadamanthus out of temper for the rest of the day.' 'But is it not a bad thing to give way to a horse?' said I, in rather a patronizing tone. 'As a general rule, yes,' replied he, in his off-hand fashion, as we cleared the next fence side by side; 'but inconvenient under some circumstances. I might compel a poor brute to attempt yonder stone wall, but he might break my neck in so doing, and would, in all probability, if he went at it against the grain; so I should hardly be a gainer by rigid adherence to principle.' "

"That is so like him," interrupted Mrs. Maynard, laughing. "He contrives very often to do the right thing, but the reasoning by which he supports his conduct, is so eccentric, that I

believe he hits upon his conclusions by accident, and invents afterwards the process by which he might have arrived at them. Now, in this instance, it is pretty plain that he did not feel equal to the first leap, so he wove his theory about not pressing an unwilling horse, to cover his hesitation."

"He made little use of it then, for after that one check, he literally stopped at nothing. He took everything before him, just as it came; and one flight he accomplished, a sloping bank with a hedge on the top of it and a mill pond on the farther side, struck all the spectators with astonishment. Only one man ventured to follow, and he got a ducking for his pains. Before that, a lot of us were craning at a difficult place, when up comes Leycester, bowling steadily along, and holding his hat well before his face (to save it from scratches, the puppy!) crashed clean through the fence like a cannon ball, and left a nice gap for fainter hearts to enter by. When we pulled up after a hard run, he was just as cool and collected as if he were astride on a sofa-cushion; you would never have suspected from his manner that he had done anything extraordinary."

Arthur was quite enthusiastic on the subject. Mary listened with amused surprise, and when the party assembled again for dinner, surveyed her host with a fresh accession of interest. Was it possible that this fragile looking creature, who came down, half-an-hour after she had seen him all but faint from over exertion, as trim and unruffled as if he had spent the afternoon in his dressing-room, had actually performed the daring feats described by her husband? It did not occur to her that Adonis was addicted to the chase, as well as Nimrod.

The Captain had made fatigue the excuse for a hasty toilette, and appeared the most done up of the two. He drank a great deal of beer at dinner, and grew heavy and dull afterwards; Leycester quaffed champagne, and was as lively as a cricket; though when they adjourned to the drawing-room, he was obliged to resort to a sort of reclining chair, so constructed as to afford the utmost possible amount of repose to a weak spine. Stretched nearly at full length upon this, he gave the ladies a most entertaining account of the day's proceedings, not omitting honorable mention of "my gallant friend who is nodding on yonder couch." The affair of the mill-pond he

characterised as a somewhat fool-hardy exploit, which the rest of the field had done wisely not to imitate.

"It was not quite so insane in my case," continued he, "for I am a very light weight, and Rhadamanthus has an enormous stride."

"He must be a valuable animal," observed Mrs. Maynard, not sorry perhaps to attribute to the horse, part of the merit claimed for the rider.

"Well, he is, to any one that can ride him," replied Hyacinth. "The qualification sounds boastful, but all I mean is this. The beast is powerful, fleet, sagacious, but he has a temper. If he is not in the humour to go, he would upset you over a furze-bush; when he is inclined for a run, the person he condescends to carry must be prepared for hard work. To pull him in, when once his blood is up, is a task requiring superhuman exertion. I find it far less trouble to sit tight and take my chance. The consequence is, that he causes me to perform some brilliant feats, and occasionally loses me a day's hunting altogether. Now this suits me well enough, but you see it is not every man that could afford to keep a hunter he could not

depend on, for the sake of one or two splendid runs in a season."

"Married men have really no right to expose themselves to such risks," remarked Anna, "nor ought they to sit up half the night talking of their misdeeds. With your leave, Mary, I will ring for bed-room candles. Capt. Maynard, I see, is asleep already."

Hyacinth protested against being sent to bed; but he was too tired to show before noon of the following day. As the rest were returning from an early stroll through the grounds, they descried him basking in the sunshine outside the drawing-room window, where he had extemporised a couch by the help of the sofa cushions. Mary's housekeeping instincts were roused by the sight; costly drawing-room furniture to be used in that way!

"Well to be sure!" she broke out. "It is always a wonder to me that Mr. Leycester cannot sit upon a chair, like a Christian, instead of perpetually lounging upon pillows, in that Jazy, Oriental fashion!"

"Did you not confer on him the title of Sultan?" said Anna, laughing.

"And do you allow those damask cushions to

be dragged out of doors, and *smoked upon* in that manner?"

"The cigarette will leave no perceptible traces, I hope," replied Anna; "but any way, you would not have me put a silk cushion in the balance against my husband's comfort? What are all these things for, but to afford him ease or gratification?"

Mary cast up her eyes in mingled horror at the doctrine, and thankfulness that her spouse had not heard it, he having gone forward to salute their host.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Human destinies look ominous without some perceptible intermixture of the sable or the grey."

BLITHEDALE ROMANCE.

WHILE winning the favor of one guest by noble horsemanship, Mr. Leycester found his way at last to the other's good graces by the notice he took of her child. He quickly established himself on a most friendly footing with that young lady, whose shyness generally was remarkable; she seemed more at home with him than with her own father. Arthur was very fond of her; but had not the art of winning a child's confidence. He would take the little girl from her nurse, hug her, and dandle her on his knee; but beyond this and a few phrases couched in what he imagined to be baby-language, he was quite at a loss what to do or say to her. Now, Hya-

cinth's resources were well-nigh inexhaustible; he knew all the nursery rhymes that ever were composed, and would recite them, with vocal and dramatic illustrations comical enough to provoke laughter even from grown-up hearers; he could go through every performance by which successive generations of infants have been amused, and when these grew stale, invent others of equal merit.

No wonder Miss Maynard made violent efforts to get to him whenever he came in her way! no wonder that her mother's heart warmed to him at the sight! Mary had been proof against all the fascinations which told with such resistless effect upon most of her sex; but when she saw this superfine gentleman calmly surrender his ambrosial whiskers to the tug of baby's fists, and heard him employ his soft voice to imitate a series of animal cries for baby's edification, she was ready to forgive him all his little vanities, and admit him to be a very charming person indeed.

In spite, however, of the approbation with which she viewed his behaviour towards children in general, and her own in particular, Mary was

not altogether satisfied with the adoption of Janine into the family. She was a fair little fellow, she confessed; and likely to atone for the irregularity of his existence by keeping his father out of further mischief; yet his position as acknowledged son of the house, was repugnant to her feelings, as well as to her notions of propriety. She could never have borne to have constantly before her eyes the memorial of a husband's perfidy; and foresee a thousand inconveniences to all parties concerned from following so unusual a course. What was to become of the boy as he grew up? she wondered. Did Mr. Leicester really intend to bring him up as the heir of his name and fortune?—a fortune wholly derived from his wife!

“As to the name,” said Anna, “it is still an open question, though I myself see no reason for withholding that, when the parental connexion is honestly avowed and acted upon. With regard to fortune, I have taken it upon me to provide that the child whom I have adopted shall never upbraid me with having reared him in luxury, and left him to struggle for bread. Without impugning Hyacinth's good

feeling, or sense of justice, the day may come when he may marry again, and have other children"

"Oh, Aunt!"

"My dear, the case I am supposing is far from improbable. And lest it should happen that on the advent of legitimate offspring, his true first-born should be ignored or slighted, I have secured to him by will a sum sufficient to maintain the rank in which we propose to educate him. This arrangement of course does not prevent Hyacinth from making any further disposition he may please in favor of the child; it merely guards Jasmine against the possible effects of carelessness, caprice, or hostile influence."

"Thanks to your foresight, then, his future may be regarded as tolerably secure, in a pecuniary point of view. Still the question remains, what part is he to play in the world? The thin disguise of an adopted son will deceive nobody; and he himself will be the first to suffer from the attempt to force him into society."

"Deception we have never sought to practise," replied Mrs. Leycester; "no cause is served by fraud, however harmless. Nor is it necessary in

this instance to propitiate fortune by any such artifice. The world, so far as I have been able to discover is much less susceptible on the score of legitimacy than it suits the purpose of morbid novelists to represent it. Let a young man be well bred, modest, and properly introduced, and it must be his own fault if he be not accepted in the very best circles. Jasmine promises to be handsome; he will have the habits and education of a gentleman; his purse will not be empty; with these advantages, added to his father's countenance and support, I imagine he will find the bar sinister on his escutcheon no great impediment to his progress."

Mary's thoughts were forcibly drawn to the contrast between Mrs. Leycester's mode of encountering a domestic difficulty, and that of Mr. Bathurst, under whose roof she had spent a few days on her road to Hildhurst. There, though a reconciliation had been effected, all was sombre and chilling; the husband distrustful and sour; the wife subdued and uncomfortable. The two were walking through life side by side, but not hand in hand; their respective duties were punctiliously performed; the peace established between them was never broken by disputes or re-

crimination; but Mary would almost have preferred the stormiest weather to that dead calm,—the calm, too, not of the tropics, where nature lies prostrate under the intense heat, but of the arctic regions, where her pulses are benumbed by the stern gripe of cold.

Here, on the contrary, the home atmosphere was bright and genial; the clouds that now and then arose to chequer it were quickly dispersed. Instead of a formal treaty, in which the aggrieved party dictated terms to the aggressor, there was a hearty alliance. If old wrongs were remembered, it was only to heighten the tender consideration with which each treated the other. Yet in this case, grave offences had been committed; while in the former, nothing worse than levity was charged! The parallel, perhaps, could not in fairness be exactly carried out; a suspected wife must, for reasons easier to appreciate than to explain, look for harder measure than a convicted husband; nevertheless, a certain mental anatomist has not fallen very wide of the truth, when he says, "*Les hommes seuls ont la force de ne pas pardonner.*"

Amiable, however, as it was of Mrs. Leycester to espouse the little usurper's interests, Mary

could not quite repress a feeling of jealousy on her aunt's behalf.

"I do so wish you had a child of your own!" she exclaimed.

"So used I," replied Anna, with a half sigh; "but I have long been reconciled to the deprivation. An infant would have taken up too much of my time and thoughts, now wholly at Mr. Leicester's service. He is not strong, as you must have observed, and perhaps never will be again; this of itself throws him a great deal upon my hands. Besides which, he is not one of the rational order of husbands, who, once convinced of a wife's attachment, care for no further demonstration of the fact. To my Sultan, female companionship and blandishments are never superfluous; he must communicate what he has on his mind, he loves to be courted and made much of; and would be both wretched and wrathful, if I had any engagement that interfered with his monopoly of my attention."

"Well, but," said Mary, "admitting the objection men have to find themselves of secondary importance, it appears to me that Master Jasmine obtains as large a share of your notice as your own son could have enjoyed, and Mr. Ley-

cester betrays no displeasure at your fondness for him."

"You must consider that any regard I show for the boy reverts as a personal compliment to his sire. It is evident that if *I* love that child, I love him simply because he is Hyacinth's flesh and blood; so that which might have been a source of discontent, becomes a gratification."

Mary glanced curiously at the speaker, searching in her countenance for the bitterness that was not to be detected in her tone, but nothing of the sort was visible. "I thought all human love was based upon illusion," she then observed; "but it seems you can read another mind like a *clair-voyante*, and continue to idolize its owner like the blindest of fond women. In spite of the disproportion of age, Mr. Leycester did a very wise thing for himself in marrying you. With almost any other partner, I venture to affirm he would have been, in a twelvemonth, either hated or despised."

"My dear Mary!"

"Mind, I do not say he would have merited hatred or contempt, but I consider him most

possessed in regarding as himself a person capable of knowing all the good that was in him, and making his very infirmities respectable. Thus, his superiority seems to be infinite, when it is your superiority in weakness or error; his careless way of reveling upon the all matters connected with marriage, has the force of delicacy in a man accused of marrying with mercenary motives; while his superiority in marriage, and petty desires, your unlimited intelligence leaves him no opportunity for their display."

"What these dispositions exist, they will be and will believe me," said Mrs. Leycester. "It may be true that a wife of his own age would not have taken so much pains to render his home agreeable: she would naturally have expected him to consult her tastes, and live to her wishes, while Clay's notions of marriage have rather an Oriental cast, and he expresses such words as to live, and to serve, in the passive form. Well, if I study his pleasure a little more, and exact somewhat less than a younger woman, I owed him that compensation. And in justice to him, let me say, that very few men, having made a false start in

matrimony, would have retrieved the error as he has done. Whatever the future may have in store for me, I shall have enjoyed, through his means, four or five years, at least, of such bliss as seldom falls to the lot of mortals."

"Is it from want of confidence in his stability that you speak so doubtfully of the future? Do you think him likely to relapse into his old habits?"

"Nay, I mean no imputation upon the strength of his principles, but I sometimes fear the present state of things is too good to last. When one reads at the final page of a fairy tale, how the hero and heroine 'lived happily ever after,' one smiles at the boldness of the fiction. Can I hope to see it realized in my case? Hyacinth is but just thirty, an age when the passions are still strong enough to overpower the voice of conscience. Considering the temptations he must meet with in the world, I dare not count on continuous resistance. Will he always be contented to sit at my feet? and if he be drawn away, how shall I, in the decline of life, be able to charm him back? Ah! my dear, that is where the inequality of years tells so frightfully against me. Unless I am fortunate enough to

die before all vestiges of youth are extinguished in me, I must either be *délaisée* myself and a cause of sin to him, or sink into the scarcely less painful position of an encumbrance, submitted to, perhaps, with praiseworthy resignation, Cinthy is not the man to do anything harsh or discourteous—but none the less acutely felt.”

“What are you ladies talking about so intently?” said a clear voice, as Hyacinth stepped into the room through the open door of the conservatory. “Abusing your scapegrace, Anna?” he continued, seating himself literally “at her feet.”

“Had he heard?” thought both ladies at the same moment. Seeing her friend unprepared with an answer, Mary came to her aid. She pointed to a book lying before her, and said lightly:

“We certainly began with a discussion about you. I was reading this pretty version of Tasso’s melancholy story; and Mrs. Leycester thinks the description of him applies with striking fidelity to you.”

“Will you favor me with it?”

Mary read out accordingly, with mischievous

emphasis: "Oval face, eyes of a vivid blue, hair of a mezzotint between brown and fair, white and even teeth, a most sweet expression, and a winning, engaging address."

Hyacinth nodded his head approvingly between each phrase. "Yes," he said, "that is something in my style. I may pique myself on being very like a great poet, with the trifling exception of the poetry."

"Who knows?" said Mary. "You may possess the gift, though you have not found it out yet. Why not try your hand upon 'Sebastopol Overthrown,' a pendant to 'Jerusalem Delivered?'"

"There is really one point of similarity between me and Tasso," observed Hyacinth, drawing his wife's arms round his neck. "He was the devoted slave of a lady some years his senior, whose rare qualities caused the lapse of time to be forgotten."

"Ah! but he never put his romantic fancy to the test of marriage," murmured Anna, bending over him.

"No; there I have the advantage of him, in so far as a reality is better than a dream," an-

swered Leycester, in the same low tone, *effleurant* with his lips the finger encircled by her wedding ring.

Anna shook her head, but the shadow of the future passed from her brow.

CHAPTER XIX.

"The one emotion, neither regard, liking, honour, or esteem, yet including and surpassing all—the *love*, without which it is so dangerous, often so fatal, for a woman to marry."

AGATHA'S HUSBAND.

THE Maynards' visit drew to a close. In spite of many differences of character and opinion, the gentlemen parted with increased respect for each other; the ladies with undiminished affection. When the last adieux had been exchanged, and Hildhurst was finally shrouded from view, Arthur settled himself comfortably in the carriage, and conformably to established precedent, began to comment on his late entertainers.

"That is about the pleasantest house I ever was in;" so ran his verdict. "The arrangements are first-rate; the mistress is charming, and the master not half a bad fellow, with all his dandified airs. I really don't see what there was to find fault with in that match, Mary;

they seem to fit into each other about as well as most married people."

"It has not turned out so much amiss," Mary admitted; "but what a risk to run!"

"So are all marriages, if you come to that," rejoined her husband, "but the conditions of this one were equitable enough. Here was an amiable and accomplished lady, with lots of money and a heart running over with tenderness; here was, on the other hand, a young gentleman of polished manners, pretty to look at, easy of disposition, with a decided taste for luxury, and a strong repugnance to hard work. What so natural as an alliance between them?"

"It is a position that would not suit every man," objected Mary. "Some people might think it undignified to be so dependent upon their wives."

"Some people are donkeys," retorted the captain, "and some are bears, so that it is not every man who would suit the situation. There are golden pheasants made to be kept in an aviary, as there are common brown ones left to pick up a living in the woods, and get shot in the end—as I dare say I shall be one of these fine days."

"One would think you envied Mr. Leycester!" said Mrs. Maynard, with a dash of asperity in her tone.

"Not I. One may admire a cage without wishing to live in it; but I can understand many a woman envying his wife. Why, I have known fellows without a shilling in their pockets marry rich girls, and behave shamefully to them; appropriating their whole fortune with insolent selfishness, and not even compensating them by a decent show of consideration. Our exquisite friend yonder has apparently no sins of that kind to answer for."

"No; he is certainly entitled to some credit on that score, and I begin to think I have done him scant justice in other respects. Perhaps the tendency everybody else has to fall into raptures about him, has rather driven me to take the opposition side; but I frankly confess that the chief thing now to be desired is that he should cease to look so preposterously youthful. If he had but a few wrinkles, or a larger circumference about the waist, my dear aunt would appear less out of place beside him, but I declare he has not aged in the least since I first saw him."

"Nor will he for many a year to come. He is just the sort of man to look young until he is downright old. A fair complexion is a great advantage to begin with; and you will tell me he takes immense pains with himself, in the second place,—his hair, his teeth, his hands, every inch of him, in short, being cultivated to the highest pitch; but it is only honest to add, that moral qualities have something to do in producing the effect. With that cheerful, placid temper, his brow will always be smooth; while his temperate habits will keep his eyes bright, his colour fresh, and his figure elastic, long after most of us have fallen a prey to corpulence or rheumatism."

Unconscious of the criticism they were undergoing, Mr. and Mrs. Leycester were walking up and down the terrace, discussing their own removal to town. It was April, the season when the country begins to array itself each day in new charms, and consequently when every person with any pretensions to fashion, makes a point of quitting it. But fashion apart, a family event rendered Hyacinth's presence in London about this period indispensable. His sister's wedding was fixed to take

place at the close of the month. Lord Etheredge, from whose house the bride would go forth, was to receive at breakfast the friends who attended the ceremony. The Leycesters proposed to entertain a still wider circle of acquaintance at a ball in the evening, and preparations of all kinds had of course to be made.

Mrs. Desart was formally invited to be present at her daughter's marriage; which invitation was as formally declined, in a letter manifestly dictated by her husband. The bride did not appear much depressed at the circumstance. "Then we shall not want another carriage," was the only comment she was heard to make. Hyacinth took it more to heart, and fearing there might have been some want of cordiality in the previous communication, wrote himself to urge his mother's attendance, and beg her to be his guest during her stay in town; but to this letter, no reply at all was vouchsafed.

The Aguilars did not wait for an offer of hospitality, but wrote to claim it, intimating moreover, that as they were very short of cash just then (it was a chronic complaint with them), they could not undertake the journey, unless their expenses were paid both ways.

"Let them stay away then," cried Etheredge, when he heard of this cool request, adding a consummation which need not be further particularized. "Who wants them here? There are plenty of parsons to be had without paying carriage; and Azalea has sisters in abundance, without that full-blown Rose. I speak feelingly," added he, laughing, "for I shall have to lay in an extra dozen of chickens and Champagne, if that fellow comes to breakfast."

Leycester, however, was too good-natured to reject the stipulation, and despatched a five-pound note by return of post: all his reward for which was, to be called shabby, for not making it ten! On the strength of this "trumpery remittance," Mrs. Aguilar presented herself in the most gorgeous raiment,—a combination of flowers, feathers, lace, blonde, silk, velvet, and beadwork, such as could only be conceived in a milliner's distempered dreams. After such a specimen of her way of spending money, no one was surprised that she was always in difficulties. Her husband had been for many years in possession of a comfortable income; but, though dress was not the channel in which his waste waters ran, he was to the full as unthrifty as she was;

and between bad management, and an annually increasing family, their finances had sunk into a state of hopeless disorder. The most skilful accountant would have been puzzled to state what their liabilities actually were, and how much they might call their own.

Yet, painful as these embarrassments might appear to less scrupulous folks, they did not in the least affect Mr. Aquilar's spirits, nor weigh permanently upon his wife's. He would indulge at times in eager aspirations after a bishopric; and she would have a fit of discontent at the superior opulence of her sisters; but meanwhile they ate, drank, and slept as usual, and were ready for any scheme of enjoyment that might turn up, without regard to its cost. Retrenchment, self-denial, were remedies they never thought of applying; it was much easier to bewail their hard fate, besiege their relations for assistance, and contrive means to stave off for the moment an ever-impending crisis! Not a cloud was visible on the face of either when they alighted in Park Lane a couple of days before the wedding, though Hyacinth's present had been so ill-husbanded, that they had not eighteen-pence between them to pay for the cab!

Nor did Rose, in spite of some exuberance of person and decoration, do any discredit to the family reputation for beauty. Lord Etheredge's drawing-room, on the eventful morning, contained a rare assemblage of loveliness. There was Violet, with her stately carriage and classical features, attired with the simplicity that suited her purse, and the taste that rendered that simplicity so becoming: there was Veronica, in the ripe bloom of early womanhood: the bride, pale, calm, and graceful: the chief bridesmaid, Camellia, in a pretty flutter of spirits at this her first public appearance as a grown-up young lady: Mrs. Leycester, dressed with the utmost *recherche* (as it was her custom to be), and beaming with animation, seemed to reflect some of the general comeliness, as she entered leaning on her husband's arm; her claim upon which he no longer sought to shirk.

It is scarcely necessary to add that, in her eyes at least, Hyacinth far outshone all the gentlemen present, most of whom were worthy of the *entourage*; the minor officials within the church, and the populace without, perhaps sharing that opinion, persisted in taking him for the bridegroom; though long experience

might have taught them that the "happy man" on these occasions is not invariably the best looking of the party, and seldom wears so cheerful and unembarrassed an air as Mr. Leicester displayed.

But setting aside the partial judgment of a wife, and the hasty conclusions of the indiscriminating multitude, there was another spectator to whom he was the chief point of attraction. Screened from observation behind a pillar in the gallery, a lady watched eagerly for his appearing, and from the moment he entered the church, riveted her gaze upon him. Learning from Mrs. Maynard the time and place of the ceremony, Laura Bathurst had been unable to resist the desire of beholding once more the man whose idle gallantry, too highly repaid by her insane attachment, had cost her so dear, and into whose life she in return had brought desolation and misery. A thousand times had her feelings towards him fluctuated; but whatever the prevailing emotion, he stood out in her memory, the one prominent figure on its canvass. With or without design, he had first taught her heart to throb; and whether it beat with love or hate, he held a place in it still.

When she had him there visibly before her, radiant, enchanting as of old, scattering smiles around, and meeting universal response, it is doubtful whether pain or pleasure were her predominant sensation. His attitude and gestures, as he moved about among the crowd, seemed strangely familiar to her. She noticed, with a touch of surprise, his reverent demeanour during the performance of the service; and observed, with a twinge of envy, how graciously he bent his head to listen to some whispered remark of his wife. The very way in which his arm lingered on her shoulder, as he replaced her mantle, had a meaning in it, to one able to interpret such tokens.

Laura felt herself thrill with a vague sense of jealousy, and hurried from the spot, carrying with her to her gloomy home two conflicting impressions; one of bitterness, that he who shared her error should, after a brief interval of penance, live in honour and esteem, smiled on even by those who were well aware of his delinquency, while a much heavier penalty was exacted from her; the other being an involuntary admission that such a man, with all his faults, was better fitted to inspire affection than the most virtuous

of his sex, if virtue were their sole recommendation.

Two or three additional guests joined the party on their return from church, among whom were the beautiful Mrs. Agnew, who was a distant relation of Sir Philip's, and her husband, a fine, tall, aristocratic man, with a genuine Crimean beard. Hyacinth was unprepared for the rencontre, Lawrance having met them accidentally the day before, and invited them to his wedding, without giving any one but Etheredge notice. With all his nonchalance there was a faint shade of embarrassment in Leycester's manner of greeting the lady; he was conscious that his color rose as she presented him to Col. Agnew, yet a glow of satisfaction suffused his breast at the thought that he could meet that man with front erect, and take his hand without a sting of conscience.

Mrs. Agnew met him with easy cordiality, behind which no awkward reminiscences seemed to be concealed. She observed him narrowly, nevertheless, as well as his wife, whose state of mind she was covertly sounding when Hyacinth joined them.

"I hope," said he, "Mrs. Leycester has pre-

vailed upon you to give us the pleasure of your company this evening, when we propose to dissipate the fumes of a champagne-breakfast by a ball supper."

Anna being called away at the minute, Mrs. Agnew hastened to assure him that she had been duly invited, and should be happy to attend.

"And will you grant me your first waltz?" pursued he, sinking into Anna's vacated chair.

"Let me feel your pulse," was the lady's reply. He smiled consciously, but presented his wrist. "Pulse temperate," continued she, bending her lucid eyes full upon him; "glance assured; yes, I think I may venture to waltz with you, without exciting feverish symptoms. I do not ask you how your cure has progressed, for I read the answer in your wife's face."

Hyacinth pressed her hand as he relinquished it. "Next to you," he said feelingly, "she is the most loveable woman in the universe, so there can be but one man happier than myself."

The banquet was over. Sir Philip and Lady Lawrance had been duly toasted, the bridesmaids had been commended to aspiring bachelors; Mr. Leicester had compounded for a speech by a song, and performed "Sir John Quil's" nuptial ditty

amid general hilarity; and the usual amount of stammering, prosing, punning, giggling, simpering, and flirting having been got through, the breakfast-table was deserted. The company formed into little groups, awaiting the departure of the newly married pair, prior to their own dispersion. Most of the ladies were gathered round the bride, to examine her travelling costume or exchange final greetings. Sir Philip had gone to see after the carriage. Mr. Sinclair turned to his neighbour and spoke.

"Well, Dacre, you and I have assisted at several marriages in this family. What sort of a one is this to be? Is it a love match? and if so, on which side is the love?"

Dacre shrugged his shoulders. "My private belief is," replied he, "that ever since a certain gaming adventure, Lawrance has been in love with our friend Cinthy, and as he could not conveniently espouse the gentleman, he has done the next thing to it by marrying his sister."

"Oh! oh! then this is what one may call a *mariage de reconnaissance*? How will that turn out, I wonder."

"It is as good a motive as any other," returned Dacre.

"But not the best, surely," interposed Mrs. Agnew, "not the right one?"

"Ah! my dear lady, that opens a wide field of enquiry. Which is the right one? Love, your goddeesship will tell me; but how many hundreds of loving couples rue the hour they came together. Mutual advantages, my worthy Cræsus here will suggest; but the nicest calculations fail to secure wedded bliss. Similarity of character, or dissimilarity,—esteem founded on moral worth, or instinctive preference,—ambition, convenience, obligation, spite, sudden impulse, persuasion of friends; have not all these motives been tried, and found wanting?"

"Why, you dreadful old bachelor!" exclaimed Mrs. Agnew, "such arguments go to prove that on no possible grounds can matrimony be prudent or desirable."

"Being, as you say, a bachelor of mature experience, I may be excused for holding such unpopular views," answered Dacre, smiling. "The sum of all my observations amounts to this: that whether you trust to reason, instinct, or chance, whether you expend much thought on the subject or little, marriage is always a lottery; and that considering the frightful number of blanks

daily drawn from the wheel, its rare prizes would not tempt me, at least, to try so hazardous an EXPERIMENT.

Mrs. Agnew and Mr. Sinclair both protested against so sweeping a denunciation; several of the bystanders were drawn into the controversy, and a variety of opinions, more or less sound and sensible, were elicited; but when the discussion was at its height, a general move announced that the newest victims to the matrimonial epidemic were about to take their departure. Much shaking of hands ensued; then a rush to the windows; the carriage dashed away from the door; and the company separated, without coming to any conclusion.

Let the question be *posée* where it may, the response is mostly of the same indecisive character. Man is said to be incapable of defining happiness except by means of negatives; the absence of pain, of want, of fear, of oppression, and so forth, constituting his only conception of the beatitude of Heaven itself. Something of the same imperfection attaches to every theory yet started on the fertile theme of Marriage. Ask what should be its aim? what its conditions? and out of the infinite variety of replies

received, by far the greater number will take the negative form; for each reflecting speaker will think he discerns the cause of failure in most cases which have fallen under his observation, while in the few instances where results of striking brilliancy have been achieved, he is at a loss to discover the precise method of production. Suppose the enquiry addressed to the chief of those personages with whose fortunes the reader of these pages has been concerned, here are some of the replies we should obtain.

"Don't marry for money," says Hyacinth Leycester, with a fond glance at his wife; "it is not every man who bargains for a handful of gold coin, that is lucky enough to get an *angel* among them."

"Don't marry without money!" cries Rose Aguilar, from the midst of a fresh *imbroglio*; "Heaven only knows what a worry it is to bring up an increasing family upon a stationary income."

"Don't marry for rank," Lady Wilfred Grafton will confess to you in strict confidence. "Without fortune to back it, a title is a snare and an incumbrance."

"Don't marry for love," says Arthur Maynard; "the beauty that makes a girl admired in

society, does not always render her agreeable or useful at home."

"Don't marry without affection," sighs Laura Bathurst: "esteem is too cold to cement a life-long union."

"Don't let the love be all on one side," says Anna Leycester; "a woman cannot enjoy happiness unless she confers it."

Lord Wilfred echoes the caution for the reason, that it is maddening to press a lovely form to your breast, and find it made of stone.

"Don't marry for the mere sake of marrying," says Mrs. Desart, in an interval of sobriety.

"Don't marry too young," says Lady Etheridge, "before you know your own mind, and understand what it is you undertake."

"Don't put off marrying too long," says Mr. Bathurst, "till you have lost the power of captivating a woman's fancy, and must be content with respect instead of attachment."

Mrs. Maynard alone abandons the prohibitive system, and takes more positive ground. "It seems to me," she will reply, "that no one of all the reasons commonly adduced is sufficient, by itself, to explain the want of concord noticeable among married people, or to guide the un-

married in the selection of a partner. More than one attribute, more than a single favorable condition, is surely necessary to conduct an affair of that intricacy and importance to a successful termination. We know that simple valor does not constitute a great general, nor simple assiduity a great statesman; these are valuable, nay indispensable, qualities; but, unless combined with others, will not earn for their possessor a first-class reputation. So, methinks, in wedlock; neither wealth nor position, admiration nor respect, supplies, when taken separately, a basis broad enough to build the happiness of two lives upon. In a well-assorted marriage *all* these elements should be included; that is to say, there ought to be, first, a prudent provision for material wants, regard being had to the station of the contracting parties; secondly, full assurance upon such cardinal points as temper, intellect, and principle; thirdly, due attention to habits and manners, health, appearance, suitableness of age, and such apparently minor points, neglect of which has often marred the most promising alliances. It is not to be supposed for a moment that entire satisfaction on every one of these heads need be looked for; and the caprices of

the human heart can no more be accounted for by fixed rules than the aberrations of the comets; but I really believe that the three conditions I have mentioned are each and all requisite to warrant a fair prospect of wedded felicity."

Camellia Leycester draws a long face at this enumeration of the difficulties attending a worthy choice. "Good gracious! how is one ever to find out all these things? Here are no less than nine heads of examination to be gone through!" cries she, checking them off upon her fingers; "age, health, appearance, and manners; sense, temper, and principle; family, and fortune! Why, if I were to wait until I met with a gentleman possessing all those qualifications, I should die an old maid!"

"Ah, *voilà!*" says her brother, laughing, "as long as young ladies mistake the means for the end, and are more anxious to get married than careful what sort of husbands they accept, all the moralising in the world is thrown away."

THE END.

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